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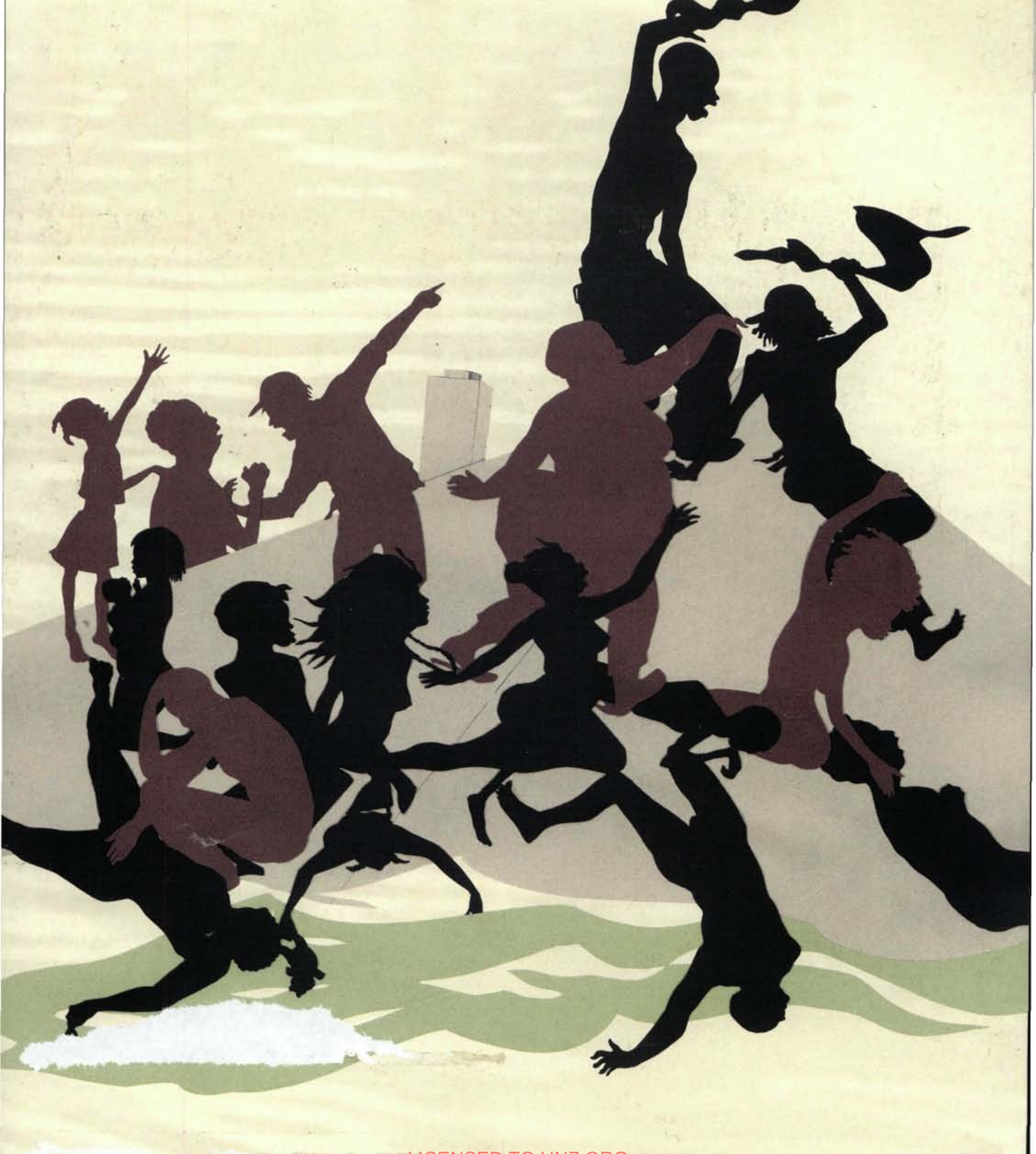
THE NEW YORKER

AUG. 27, 2007



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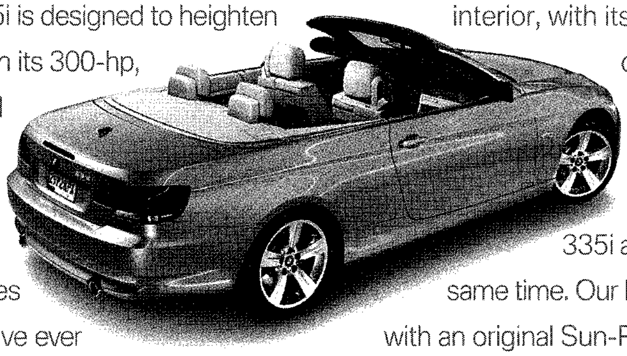

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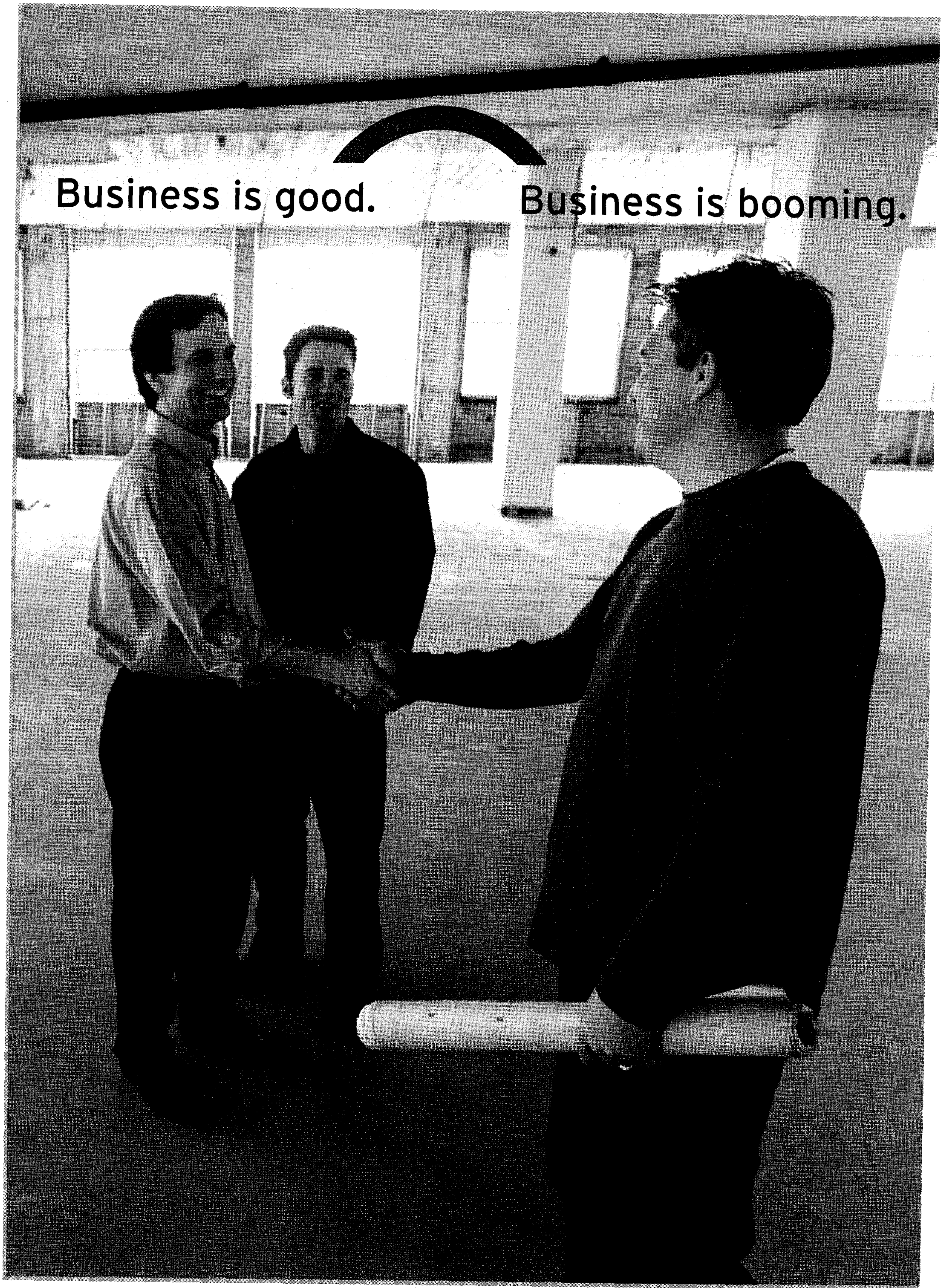
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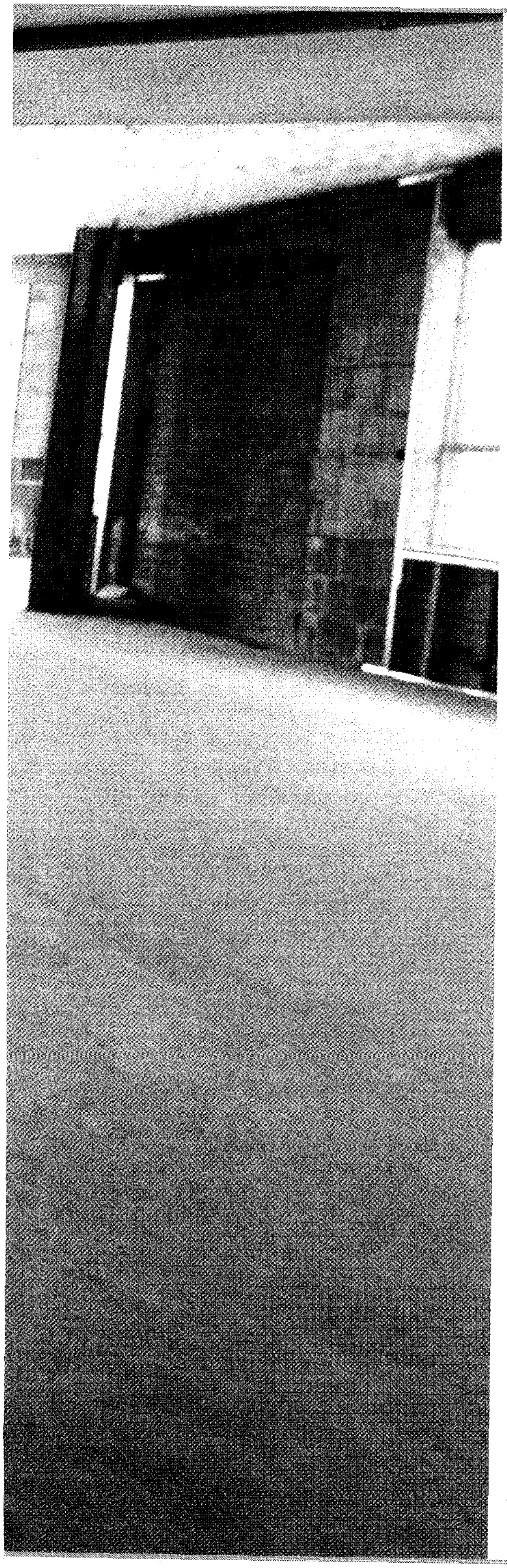

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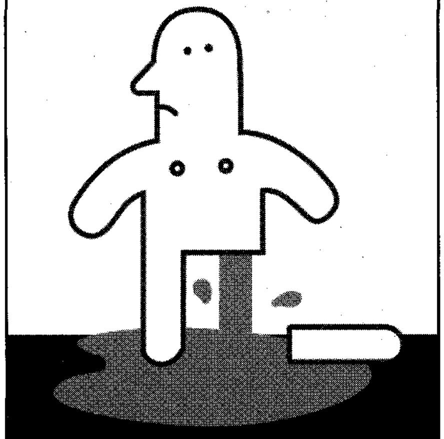

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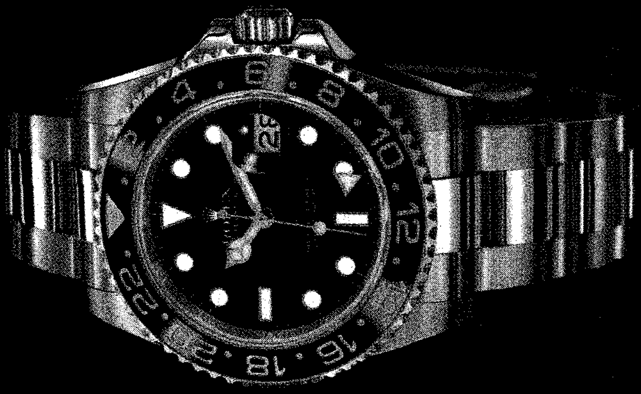

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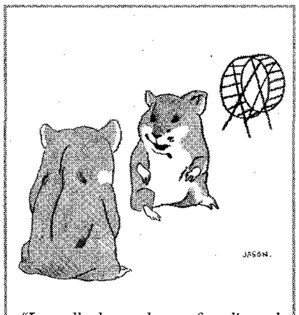
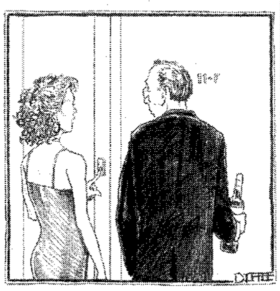


"I usually do two hours of cardio and then four more of cardio and then two more of cardio."

Jason Polan, 2006



"Just don't be yourself."

Matthew Diffee, 2006

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CONTRIBUTORS

John Seabrook ("Sowing for Apocalypse," p. 60) is a staff writer. "The Flash of Genius," his January, 1993, piece about Bob Kearns, the inventor of the intermittent windshield wiper, is being made into a movie that is due out next year.

Alex Ross ("Appalachian Autumn," p. 34) is the author of "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century," which will be published in October.

Larry Doyle (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 41) has written for "The Simpsons" and works as a screenwriter. His first novel, "I Love You, Beth Cooper," came out in May.

Rebecca Mead (The Talk of the Town, p. 30) published her first book, "One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding," in May.

Kara Walker (Cover) is a professor of visual arts at Columbia University. An exhibit of her art work and film animation will be at the Whitney Museum in October.

Kimiko Hahn (Poem, p. 52) received the 2007 Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America. "The Narrow Road to the Interior," her recent collection of poems, comes out in paperback later this year.

John Lahr ("He That Plays the King," p. 48), the magazine's senior drama critic, is the author of "Honky Tonk Parade: *New Yorker* Profiles of Show People." He is working on a biography of Tennessee Williams.

Adam Gopnik ("The Human Bomb," p. 42) is a staff writer. His books include "Paris to the Moon" and "Through the Children's Gate: A Home in New York."

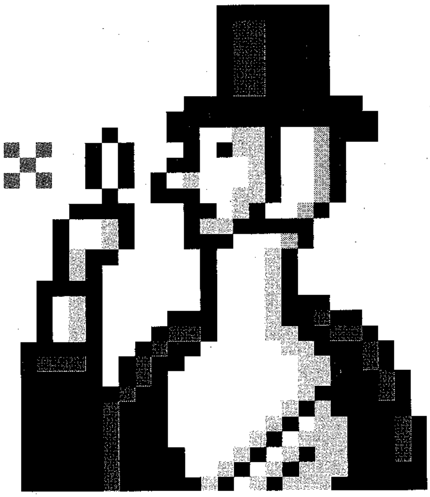
Philip Schultz (Poem, p. 68) will publish his sixth collection of poems, "Failure," in November.

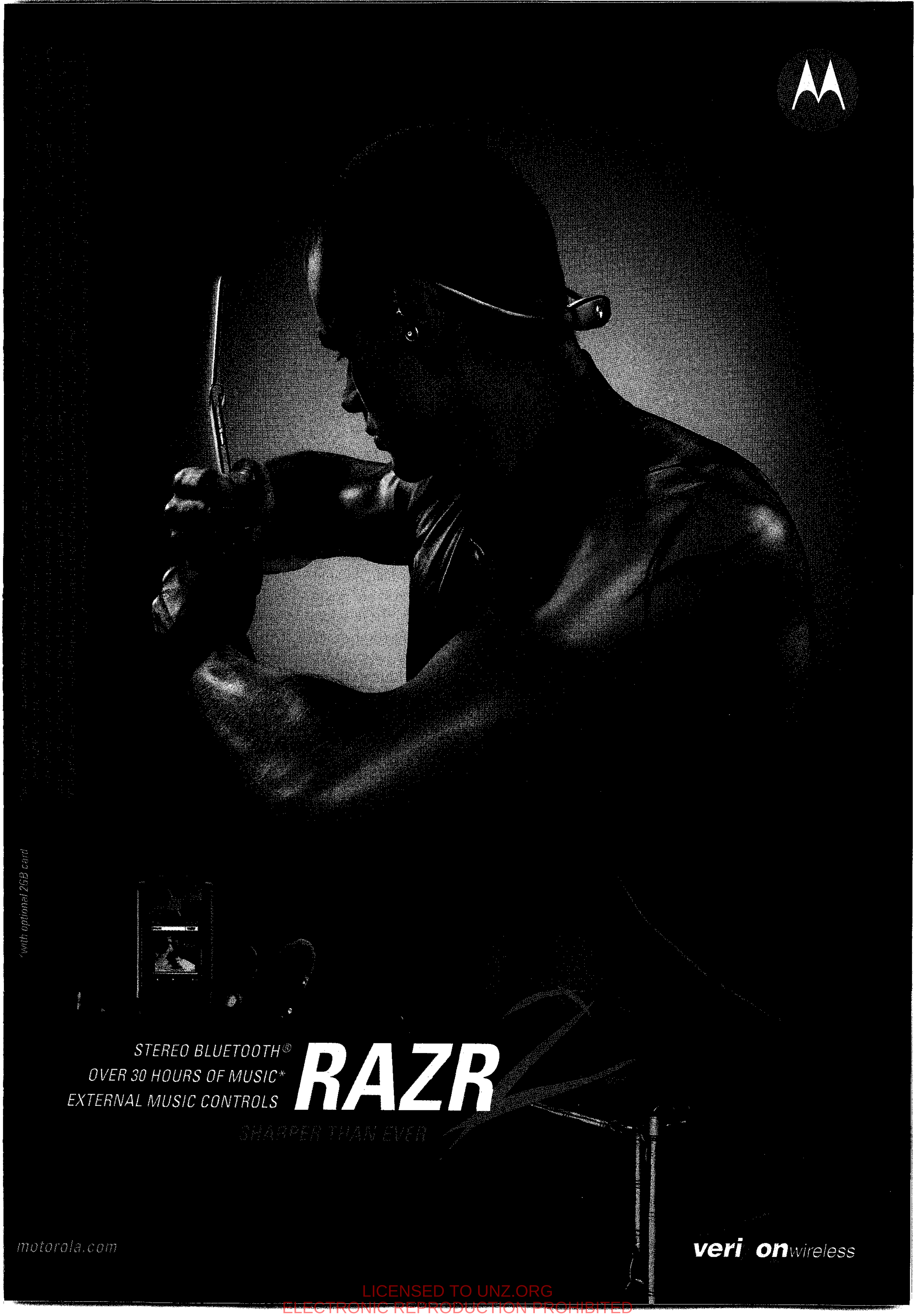
Daniyal Mueenuddin (Fiction, p. 72) practiced law in New York City for a number of years. He now lives in District Rahimyarkhan, Pakistan, where he is completing a book of short stories.

Steve Powers (Painting, p. 72) will have an exhibit of his art work at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in Philadelphia, in October.

Niall Ferguson (Books, p. 81) is the Laurence A. Tisch Professor of History at Harvard University and the author of "The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
An audio interview with *John Seabrook* about the fate of the world's seeds. / A slide show of posters promoting the Marshall Plan and a unified Europe. / Interesting Times, a blog by *George Packer.* / *Dana Goodyear's* Postcard from Los Angeles. / From the archives: *A.J. Liebling* on General George Marshall, *Penelope Gilliatt* on Michelangelo Antonioni, *Lewis Mumford* on luxury apartment buildings, *Jane Kramer* on the French elections, and more. / The Film File: thousands of capsule reviews. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events around the country.

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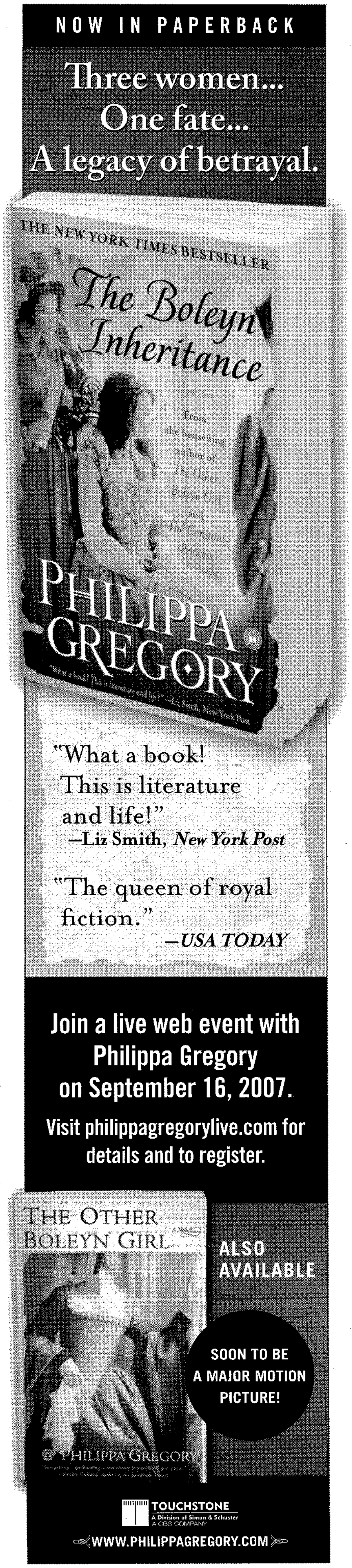
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BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE

I found the conclusion to Ian Parker's piece on bonobos—that, in the researcher Gottfried Hohmann's words, "there is no doubt that, in a hundred years, there won't be great apes in the wild"—quite distressing ("Swingers," July 30th). If we accept that there is no hope of a long-term future for our closest animal relatives (some experts predict that the orangutan will be reduced to marginal and genetically unviable populations within ten years, and the rest of the ape world within twenty to thirty years), then is it right to spend the brainpower and resources of the scientific community on finding out what the apes can teach us about our origins and evolution? Is it right to try to protect one or two groups within a few square kilometres and accept that the rest are going, and going fast? Perhaps these scientists, instead of studying the last ape specimens, should instead try to understand and possibly alter human nature as it manifests itself daily in pretty much every village in the Democratic Republic of Congo—in the destruction of the natural world and, with it, crucial life-supporting systems. Such research would lead inevitably to the logging companies' ravaging of habitats, to the politicians who illegally allocated these logging concessions, and to consumers in the developed world—surely a potentially more productive investment of time, energy, brain power, and financial resources.

Karl Ammann
Nanyuki, Kenya

Parker makes reference to the Kalahari hunter-gatherers whom I first visited in the nineteen-fifties and wrote about in "The Harmless People" and "The Old Way." He writes that these people "have a murder rate higher than any American city." While no one, including me, has ever said that killings were unknown, it is wrong to overlook their conscious efforts to eradicate the causes of violence and portray them as murderous. These former hunter-gatherers, whom we call Bushmen or San, fully understood the danger of fighting and murder, and called themselves Ju/wasi or Ju/'hoansi to reflect that fact. "/Wa" or "/'hoan" has been translated as "worthy," or "pure," as in pure water (with nothing harmful in it), or "just" as in "it's just me (and I'm not armed)." In fact, because the Ju/wasi depended so completely on each other for survival, their energy was devoted to peace-keeping, coöperation, equality, and the elimination of jealousy, partnership, unity, and friendship.

Elizabeth Marshall Thomas
Peterborough, N.H.

PURSUING FREE WILL

Louis Menand's illustration of arbitrary moments in biography, such as William James's diary entry in 1870 about free will, is not supported by the hypothesis that James might have "decided the next day that free will was overrated but didn't bother to write it down" (Books, August 6th). That would be radically inconsistent with the fact that James made the same argument fourteen years later, in "The Dilemma of Determinism," that "our first act of freedom" ought to be "to affirm that we are free." Elsewhere, Menand makes the point that the diary entry, which followed James's reading of Charles-Bernard Renouvier's argument for free will, could not be used to date James's recovery from depression, which continued to dog him for the rest of his life. Even so, Renouvier's idea of free will does play an important part in James's philosophical career, if not in his psychological history.

Cushing Strout
Ernest I. White Professor of American Studies and Humane Letters, Emeritus
Cornell University
Ithaca, N.Y.

•

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
WAR STORIES

Signature Theatre Company has dedicated the new season to its playwright-in-residence, Charles Mee. The first production is "Iphigenia 2.0," Mee's re-imagining of Euripides' "Iphigenia at Aulis," in which Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek army, fears he made a mistake in waging war and must make a sacrifice of Iphigenia, his daughter, to convince his followers of his resoluteness. Tina Landau directs. (See page 13.)

NIGHT LIFE
RENT STABILIZED

In the early nineties, the bassist Matt Sharp, of Weezer, cooked up a New Wave side project called the Rentals. After two Rentals records, Sharp retreated from the music business. He recently re-formed the group, and he brings it to the Nokia Theatre. (See page 16.)

ART
SERIAL THRILLER

The Museum of Modern Art has reinstalled its permanent collection of photographs with an emphasis on series. The chronology goes from Eadweard Muybridge to Ed Ruscha, with the expected stops along the way—landscapes of Yellowstone by Ansel Adams, portraits of Mayakovsky by Rodchenko. (See page 16.)

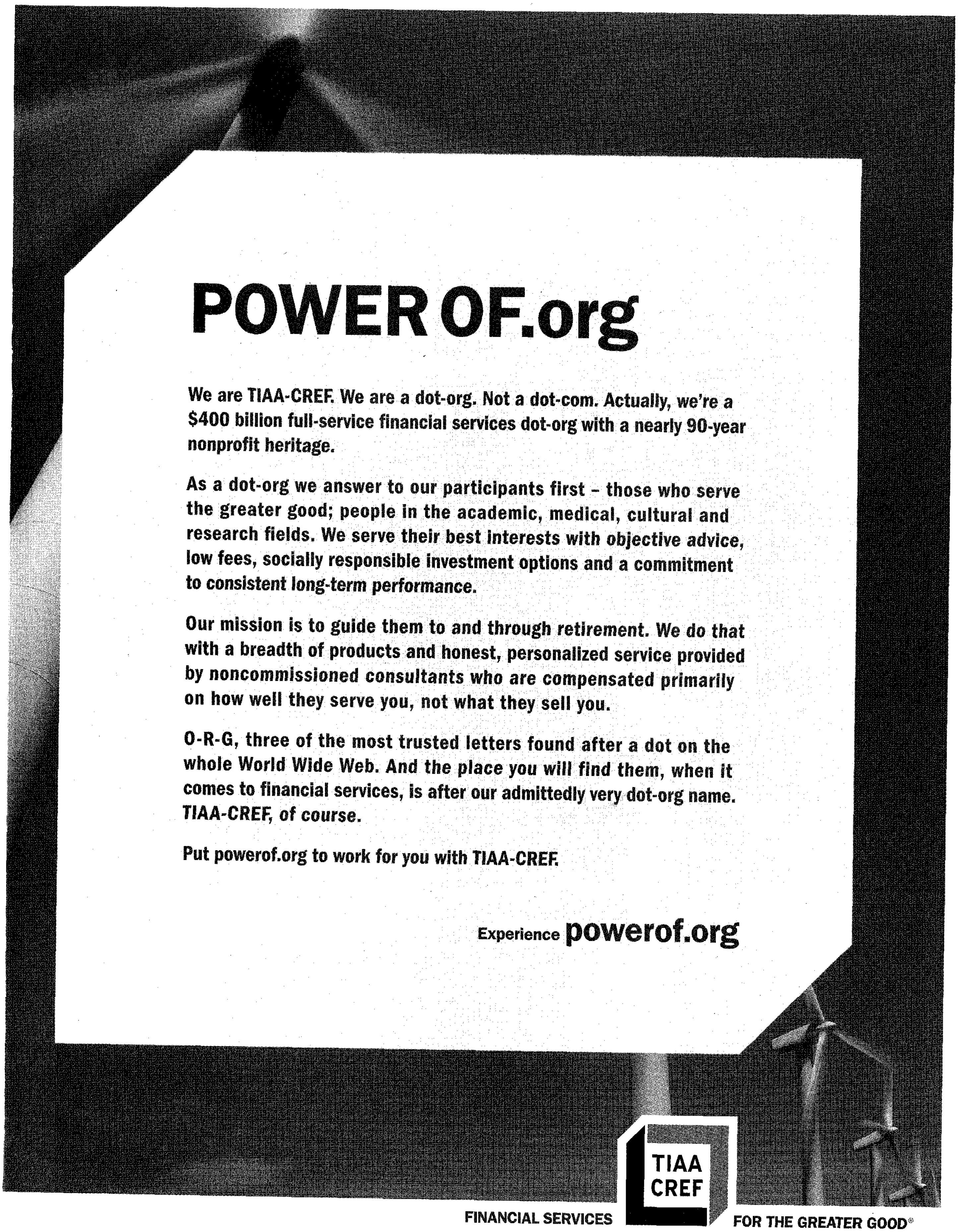
CLASSICAL MUSIC
SUMMER OF LOVE

Lincoln Center Out of Doors gives two pioneers of the nineteen-sixties experimental-music scene—the composer-accordionist Pauline Oliveros and the composer Henry Brant—time and space to do their thing in two free programs at the South Plaza, on 62nd St. (See page 20.)

MOVIES
CITY LIGHTS

Among the delights of the recent "Celluloid Skyline" show were video loops of "actuality" films showing sights and scenes of New York City between 1898 and 1906. Film Forum is offering an evening of these shorts, which bring back to life such scenes as the arrival of immigrants at Ellis Island, Buffalo Bill on parade, and the arrest of pirates in New York Harbor. (See page 24.)

The cabaret revue Weimar New York, at Spiegeltent. Photograph by Lisa Kereszi.



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FALL CULTURAL CALENDAR

Princeton University • Princeton, New Jersey

"Stick Fly"

September 7th–October 14th (times vary) • mccarter.org

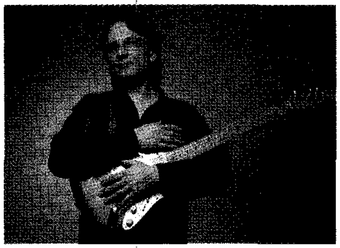
An East Coast première, this play explores race, class, privilege, and complex family relationships with both humor and heart. Lauded for her adaptation of Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye," writer Lydia Diamond makes universal themes personal through her razor-sharp dialogue and realistic portraits.

University of Illinois • Urbana-Champaign

Wall to Wall Guitar Festival

September 13th–15th (times vary) • krannertcenter.com

With its indoor-outdoor celebration of the world's most popular instrument, the Wall to Wall Guitar Festival showcases more than forty guitarists, including singer-songwriter Shawn Colvin, jazz guitar wiz John McLaughlin, and roots slide-guitarist Sonny Landreth.

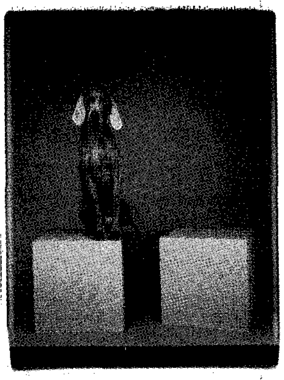


The University of Arizona • Tucson

Global Drum Project

September 20th, 7:30 P.M. • uapresents.org

In a percussion world summit, former Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart rekindles the trance-and-dance rhythms that first flamed on his 1991 Grammy Award-winning album, "Planet Drum." He and fellow musicians Zakir Hussain, Sikiru Adepoju, and Giovanni Hidalgo deliver "deep drumming," which Hart calls "sound yoga."



The Ohio State University • Columbus

"William Wegman: Funney/Strange"

September 20th–December 30th • wexarts.org

His Weimaraner photographs brought William Wegman fame. This retrospective exhibit of his works—including photography, painting, collage, video, and the dogs—from the nineteen-sixties to the present illustrates why the inquisitive and sardonic artist is dubbed "the inveterate jokester."

Yale University • New Haven, Connecticut

"Richard II"

September 21st–October 13th (times vary) • yalerep.org

In Yale Repertory Theatre's season opener, Shakespeare's play about a fourteenth-century king whose popularity plummets due to an unpopular foreign war resonates with today's audiences. Under the direction of Obie Award-winner Evan Yionoulis.

University of Florida • Gainesville

"Pamina Devi: A Cambodian Magic Flute"

September 27th, 7:30 P.M. • performingarts.ufl.edu

The Khmer Arts Ensemble reinvents Mozart's "The Magic Flute" with Cambodian cultural expression featuring the country's traditional music and classical dance, choreographed by Sophiline Cheam Shapiro. Originally commissioned by the New Crowned Hope Festival, in Vienna, "Pamina Devi" makes its United States première.

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Mark Morris Dance Group

September 28th, 8 P.M. • artscenter.org

True to his signature traits of exquisite musicality and eclectic taste, the preëminent choreographer Mark Morris delivers again with a program featuring music by such composers as Béla Bartók, Lou Harrison, and Stephen Foster.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan: "Wild Cursive"

September 28th, 8 P.M. & September 29th 8 P.M. • carolinaperformingarts.org

Rooted in Asian myths and folklore and drawing from contemporary influences, this prestigious modern-dance theatre company combines movements ranging from martial arts to Chinese opera to ballet. Influenced by the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy, "Wild Cursive" hypnotizes with fluid movements mimicking lines of ink.

The Pennsylvania State University • University Park

The Count Basie Orchestra, with Nnenna Freelon

September 29th, 8 P.M. • cpa.psu.edu

While she's known for integrating her singular jazz vocalizing with R&B and hip-hop tinges, Nnenna Freelon will take the straight-ahead, swinging route in covering newly arranged American songbook standards and contemporary fare with the Count Basie Orchestra.

Stanford University • Stanford, California

Philip Glass: "Book of Longing"

October 9th, 8 P.M. • livelyarts.stanford.edu

In a West Coast première, the composer Philip Glass presents "Book of Longing," a musical spoken-word collaboration with the folk musician and poet Leonard Cohen based on his latest collection of verse. The two-hour performance, illustrated by Cohen's artwork, features Glass on keyboards, a seven-piece ensemble, and the poet's recitations.

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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AMERICA LOVESEXDEATH
Billy the Mime is the creator and star of this show, a series of sketches about current events. Previews begin Aug. 23. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

100 SAINTS YOU SHOULD KNOW
Playwrights Horizons kicks off the season with the world première of this play by Kate Fodor, about a woman who becomes intrigued by a troubled priest at the church that she cleans. Janel Moloney, Lois Smith, Jeremy Shamos, Will Rogers, and Zoe Kazan star. Ethan McSweeny directs. Previews begin Aug. 24. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

IPHIGENIA 2.0
Signature Theatre Company opens the season with the New York première of a play by Charles Mee, inspired by the tale of Agamemnon, who fears that a costly war is not worth it. In previews. Opens Aug. 26. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
Shakespeare in the Park's second production of the season stars Martha Plimpton, Tim Blake Nelson, Laila Robins, and Jay O. Sanders. Daniel Sullivan directs. In previews. Opens Aug. 23. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

RITES OF PRIVACY
David Rhodes wrote this one-man show, in which he portrays numerous characters, including a Southern pageant queen and a Nazi refugee. In previews. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444.)

WALMARTOPIA! THE MUSICAL
Daniel Goldstein directs this musical comedy, about a Wal-Mart employee who wakes up in the year 2037, when Wal-Mart rules the world. With a book by Catherine Capellaro and music and lyrics by Andrew Rohn. In previews. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

NOW PLAYING

ABSINTHE
Last year, the variety show inhabiting the velvet-draped Spiegeltent served up a near-perfect cocktail of circus skill and cabaret innuendo, the risky and the risqué. This year, the recipe is the same, but the ingredients are weaker. The Borat-like m.c. (Voki Kalfayan) is amusing enough, his dumb-girl assistant (Anais Thomassian) funnier and filthier still. Paul Capsis convincingly channels Marlene, Judy, and Janis. And the sum of eye candy, acrobatic dexterity, and ambience just about offsets an excess of semi-sexy aerialists. (South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200.)

THE ALL-AMERICAN SPORT OF BIPARTISAN BASHING
"For political comedians, George W. Bush is pure gold," quips Will Durst, a craggy-faced, avuncular fellow who's been doing standup satire for decades (the show's opening video montage is Durst appearing on every TV news outlet since the age of the dinosaurs). Nowadays, he's perfected a verbal jitterbug of comedy and commentary, taking on politics, war, and rhetoric in an age of declining democracy. Some of his best lines are direct quotes, lifted from Bush's speeches: "I think we can all agree that the past is over." Though the Democratic candidates come in for a few obligatory knocks, with Hillary taking the lion's share, Durst considers them too lacklustre to excoriate. He saves his astringent best for the current regime, counting out the casualties. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

EURYDICE
Sarah Ruhl's luminous retelling of the Orpheus myth from his beloved wife's point of view is exhilarating. The singular, surreal world of the play is as lush and limpid as an anxiety dream of love and loss, in which both author and audience swim in the magical, sometimes menacing, and always thrilling flow of the unconscious. (Reviewed in our issue of 7/2/07.) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. Through Aug. 26.)

FAIR GAME
Karl Gajdusek wrote this drama, about a Presidential candidate's campaign and the scandal that her son starts. Andrew Volkoff directs. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

GONE MISSING
The Civilians' documentary-theatre piece, based on interviews conducted by the troupe and compiled by Steven Cosson, captures the funny and inescapably poignant details that emerge when you ask people about the things they've lost, like a shoe, body parts, memory, a Palm Pilot dropped in the panic of 9/11. The stories are punctuated by genre-hopping songs by Michael Friedman, and the actors—six of them, in snappy gray suits—provide evocative characterizations in quick succession, insuring that the variations-on-a-theme approach never gets old. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

GREASE
Kathleen Marshall directs and choreographs this revival of the musical, starring Laura Osnes and Max Crumm. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE HANGING OF RAZOR BROWN
Le Wilhelm's drama, set in 1923, takes place atop a knoll overlooking the square of a small Florida town, where an uppity French teacher has brought her charges to witness the execution of a black man falsely accused of stealing a pony. The girls naturally come to realize that their moral universe is topsy-turvy: the hanging of an innocent is considered entertainment, watermelon-seed spitting is an "art," and truth and justice are inconsequential. Wilhelm's portrait of the segregated South doesn't get much more complicated than that; worse, his depiction of the convict's blubbering, illiterate wife is as hackneyed as that of the haughty and complacent white folk. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Aug. 26.)

MEDEA
Eddie Kim adapted and directs the Euripides tragedy, at HERE Arts Center. (145 Sixth Ave. 212-352-3101. Through Aug. 26.)

MOSCOW CATS THEATRE
The family hit from Russia returns, with a new show featuring astounding stunts by a covey of flexible felines. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-307-7171.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
Scores of new plays and musicals from around the world are performed in twenty venues across the city. The offerings include "Slammer!," a musical about women in prison, by Steve Adams and Chan Chandler; Bob Sloan and Steffi Kammer's "The Box," based on Kammer's experience living in public housing while attending the Dalton School; and "Semi-Permanent," a look at memorable hair styles by the fashion hairstylist Rick Gradone. (212-279-4488. Through Aug. 26.)

THE SHATTERING OF THE GOLDEN PANE
In this new drama by Le Wilhelm, two outsiders meet in an abandoned church. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

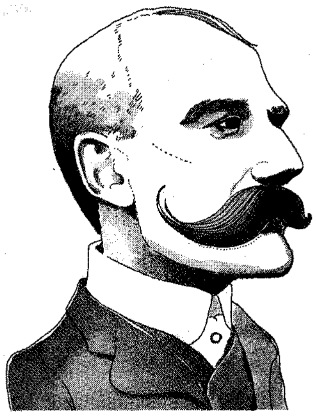
SUMMER SHORTS
A festival of nine new one-act plays, including works by Warren Leight, Skip Kennon, and Tina Howe. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

TINGS DEY HAPPEN
A scrappy little white guy channels the whole Nigerian delta in this amusing and thought-provoking one-man show. It's based on scores of interviews that Dan Hoyle conducted while researching oil politics in the crisis-ridden region—a once fertile area that's been despoiled by Exxon, Shell, and Chevron, with some help from opportunistic cronies in Lagos and the West. Relaying the first-person stories of his subjects with a certain flourish, Hoyle gets beyond black and white, and lays out the bitter wisdom of the Nigerian people, caught between a rock and a hard place. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
EDWARDIAN AGE

The very English composer Edward Elgar, whose "Pomp and Circumstance" has accompanied millions of high-school and college graduates as they stepped to their destinies, is a contested figure—beloved in some circles as a noble late-Romantic, mocked in others as a fusty relic of empire. Bard College dedicated its annual summer festival to this fascinating, ambiguous, sometimes staggeringly eloquent artist, who, around 1900, restored English music to the international stage after centuries of obscurity. An afternoon of Victorian parlor songs, anthems, and salon pieces illustrated—at strenuous length—the vacuity of the milieu from which Elgar emerged. An evening concert combined busy-bee constructions by Hubert Parry and Charles Villiers Stanford with Elgar's engagingly chaotic "In the South" overture and his lordly "Enigma" Variations. Through resourceful performances by the American Symphony under Leon Botstein's baton, you had a sense of a nation finding its voice and of a restless soul finding balance.

—*Alex Ross*



DEWEY SAUNDERS

XANADU
A ridiculously brilliant, lavish, and sublime confection inspired by the 1980 movie musical, about a Greek Muse who materializes out of a mural painted on a wall in Venice, California, and befriends an artist called Sonny, whom she inspires to open a roller disco. The playwright, Douglas Carter Beane, retained the film's basic plot, but he streamlined its action and transformed its lazy camp into something more intelligently suggestive. Far sleazier and cheesier than conventional musical theatre, it points out just how tame most other musicals are. (7/23/07) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

OUT OF TOWN

BAY STREET THEATRE
Charles Busch and Julie Halston reprise their roles in Busch's comedy "The Lady in Question," directed by Christopher Ashley ("Xanadu"). (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

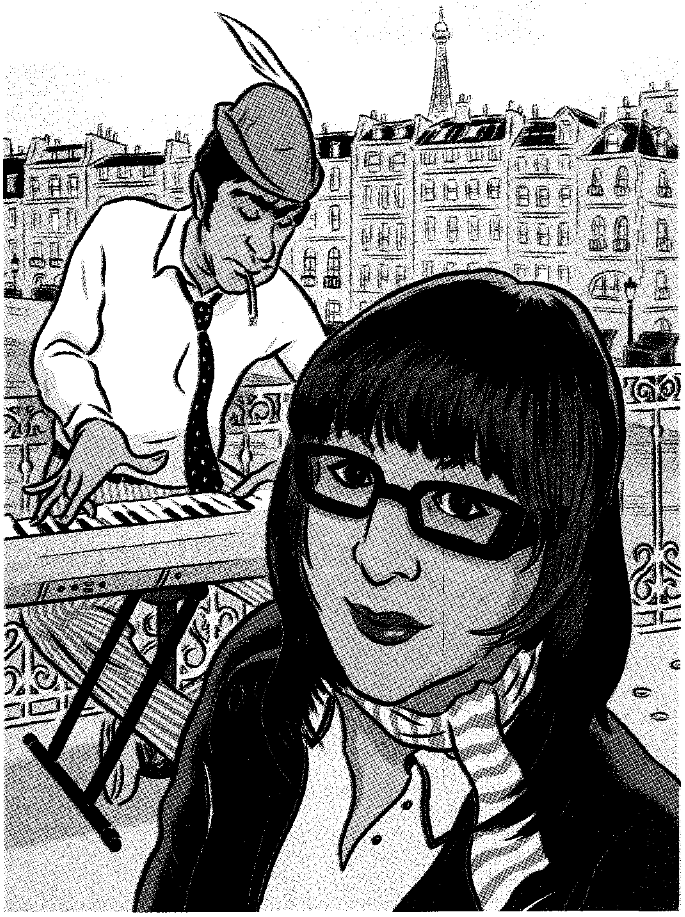
BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
"Mrs. Warren's Profession," directed by Anders Cato, and "Educating Rita," directed by Richard Corley, continue their runs. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
On the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel, "As You Like It," directed by Kurt Rhoads. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
Lillian Hellman's "The Autumn Garden," starring Allison Janney, Mamie Gummer, Elizabeth Franz, and Jessica Hecht, continues through Aug. 26. For a full schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE BRIG:** Living Theatre, 19-21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE FANTASTICKS:** Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **HUMAN ERROR:** Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200. Through Aug. 26. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 220 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MASKED:** DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **OPUS:** 59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. **THE RECRUITING OFFICER:** Central Park, 103rd St. at Central Park W. 212-252-4531. Through Aug. 26. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TOM CREAN: ANTARCTIC EXPLORER:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Aug. 25.


The Continental duo Stereo Total visits the Bowery Ballroom.

MICKEY DUZYJ

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Aug. 22: The euphoric grooves of **Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars.** Aug. 23: The ska-punk of Southern California's **Aquabats.** Aug. 25: **Shemekia Copeland** may be the daughter of the guitar legend Johnny Copeland, but she's a powerhouse singer in her own right. Aug. 27: **David (Honeyboy) Edwards,** one of the last of the original Delta-blues acoustic guitarists, has played with Robert Johnson and Big Joe Williams. His guest is the blues guitarist **Louisiana Red.** Aug. 28: Captured in all their glory in a memorable scene in the late Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film, "Blow-Up," the original **Yardbirds** were a crucial British blues-rock combo, counting no less than Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and the future Led Zeppelin sorcerer Jimmy Page in their ranks. The current incarnation of the band, spearheaded by two original members, the rhythm guitarist Chris Dreja and the drummer Jim McCarty, may lack the six-string pyrotechnics of their alumni, but it faithfully replicates the original lineup's sound.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 26: Stars of the comedy, rock, and literary worlds unite for the **"Revenge of the Book Eaters"** show, part of an effort to promote children's literacy. The musicians **Fiest, A. C. Newman** (of the New Pornographers), and **Britt Daniel** (from Spoon) join the writer **Sarah Vowell,** the comedian **Demetri Martin,** and others. The performance benefits 826NYC, a Brooklyn-based nonprofit writing center for kids. (The show's title comes from a story written by a student at the center.) (For more information, visit www.bookeaters.org.)

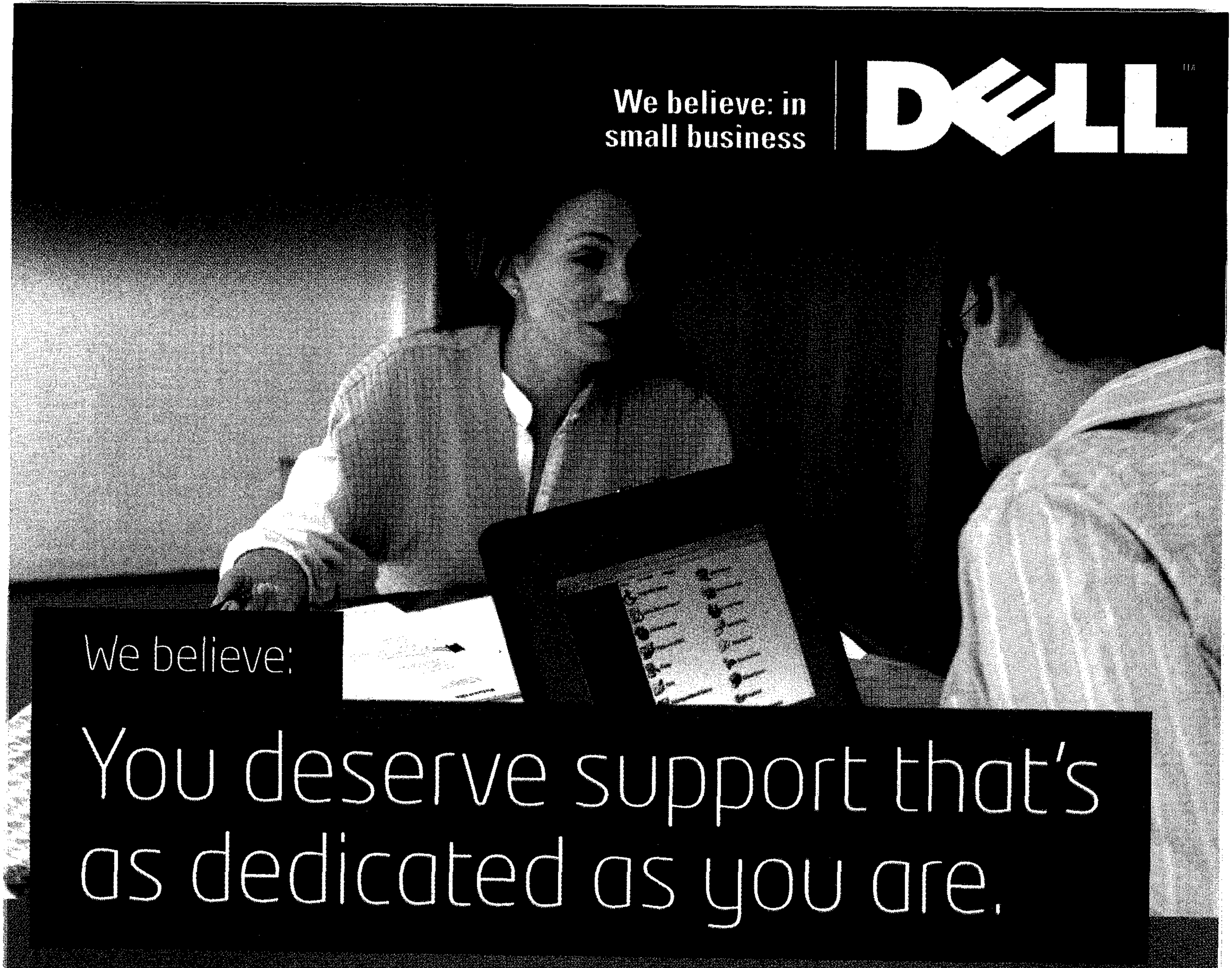
BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 24: **Stereo Total** is Brezel Göring and Françoise Cactus, a European couple who are caught up in a long-running affair with the pop sounds of the past. Like all affairs, it's a complicated business, full of clever (electronic) manipulation: their songs turn punk, hip-hop, disco, chamber pop, and anything else you can think of into wholly original, shamefully indulgent pleasures. Their latest record is called "Paris Berlin."

CAKE SHOP
152 Ludlow St. (212-253-0036)—Aug 28: **Alina Simone,** a sprightly Ukrainian-born, suburban-Boston-raised songwriter with a richly textured voice, celebrates the release of her new album, "Placelessness," which evokes but does not mimic many of the pop milestones of the past decade, including the fractured beats of Radiohead and the exuberance of Björk. The thirty-two-year-old, whose father refused recruitment by the K.G.B. and was punished with years of hard labor in the Soviet Army, moved to Austin after college and started singing on the street to conquer stage fright. More recently, Simone has spent time in Siberia while making her mind up about being a singer. Fortunately, she decided she wanted to be one. For this show, she'll accompany herself on autoharp, and she'll perform the occasional song in Russian. Also on Aug. 28: **Afuche,** an evolving local group (consisting, more or less, of percussionists, an upright-bass player, and a trumpeter, along with a keyboardist and other multi-instrumentalists) with a cacophonous yet catchy approach; their compositions could easily serve as silent-film soundtracks. With the more conventionally New Wavish trio **Fan Tan** and **Schooner,** a winning five-piece retro-pop group from Chapel Hill that has an all-enveloping, mildly psychedelic sound.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Aug. 24: North Carolina's **Squirrel Nut Zippers** (who take their name from an old-time candy bar) made a big splash in 1997 with the hit song "Hell," a quirky ode to damnation couched in a slippery hybrid of big-band swing and hot jazz. The band rode the crest of the retro-swing craze and quietly slipped from the scene after the release of its album "Bedlam Ballroom," in 2000. Recently, however, the band got back together, picking up right where it left off.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Aug. 28: For the past five years, the veteran neo-folkie **Michelle Shocked** has been attending the West Angeles Cathedral Church of God, in L.A., and her forthcoming album, "ToHeavenURide," which was recorded live at a bluegrass festival in Colorado, in 2003, has a gospel spirit. Her current set list pays tribute to Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the Staple Singers, and Billie Holiday.

JONES BEACH
Wantagh, N.Y. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 25: The Long Island progressive hard-rock band **Dream Theater** prides itself on playing with a technical virtuosity that makes vintage Rush sound like the Ramones. It has amassed a loyal fan base, but to the casual listener's ear, Dream Theater's complicated bombast can be off-putting.



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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 23: The **Rentals** started off as a cheeky side project for Matt Sharp when he was the bassist for Weezer. Playing quirky pop tunes with a retro-New Wave bent, the ensemble (which counted the future "Saturday Night Live" cast member Maya Rudolph in its ranks) scored a hit with "Friends of P" in 1995. Sharp left Weezer in the wake of its second album, "Pinkerton," from 1996, for a folksy solo career. A few years ago, though, he got the itch to rock again, and put the Rentals back together. The current lineup includes the Texas singer Sara Radle as well as the vocalist Rachel Haden (who is the only member returning from the early days). With **Copeland** and **Goldenboy.**

RUMSEY PLAYFIELD
Central Park, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 28: The perpetual adolescents in Southern California's **Slightly Stoopid.** With **G. Love & Special Sauce,** a dynamite trio from Philadelphia that plays loose and swinging songs—delightful odes to John Lee Hooker, hoops, beer, and other lowdown pleasures, and **Ozomatli,** the extra-large Latin-funk collective from L.A.

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK
32-01 Vernon Blvd., Long Island City, Queens—Aug. 26: Matthew and Eleanor Friedberger, the eclectic, prolific brother-sister indie rockers who record and perform as the **Fiery Furnaces,** specialize in sensational sonic confusion and emotional exhaustion. (For more information, visit www.socratessculpturepark.org.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Aug. 22-25: The pianist **Paul Bley,** the bassist **Gary Peacock,** and the drummer **Paul Motian** can swing with the best of them, yet their true métier is tempolèss group interplay that pushes both standards and originals to the brink of free, if disciplined, improvisation. For nearly a half century, they've got together on occasion for meetings that are always bracing.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Aug. 21-26: The newest edition of the über bassist **Dave Holland's** sextet features the trumpeter **Alex Sipiagin,** the saxophonist **Antonio Hart,** and the pianist **Mulgrew Miller.** Plan on hearing plenty of fresh material; the band heads straight to the recording studio following this engagement.

CHARLIE PARKER JAZZ FESTIVAL
Abbey Lincoln, the venerable jazz singer and composer who has risen to near-matriarchal status, and the octogenarian drummer and bandleader **Chico Hamilton** headline both the festival's uptown show on Aug. 25 (at Marcus Garvey Park, Fifth Ave. at 120th St.) and its downtown show on Aug. 26 (Tomkins Square Park, St. Marks Pl. at Avenue A). The pianist **Marc Cary** and the singer **Lezlie Harrison** join them on Saturday; the trumpeter **Maurice Brown** and Wynton Marsalis-band veteran **Todd Williams** appear on Sunday. (For more information, visit www.cityparksfoundation.org.)

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Aug. 22-26: **John Patitucci,** a fleet, in-demand bassist, who has recently been working with Wayne Shorter, fronts his own trio with the guitarist **Steve Cardenas** and the drummer **Antonio Sanchez.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Aug. 24-26: The singer **Luciana Souza** is joined by the pianist **Edward Simon,** the saxophonist **Chris Potter,** and others who were among the backing musicians on her latest album, "The New Bossa Nova," an ambitious project that puts a Brazilian spin on classic singer-songwriter material by Paul Simon, James Taylor, Randy Newman, and Joni Mitchell.

LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS
Aug. 26: The **Mingus Big Band** and the **Mingus Orchestra,** conducted by Gunther Schuller, celebrate the great bassist, who would have turned eighty-five in April. (Damrosch Park Bandshell. For more information, call 212-546-2656, or visit www.lincolncenter.org.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Aug. 21-26: The **John McNeil/Bill McHenry** quartet. The trumpeter McNeil and the saxophonist McHenry, who have had a weekly gig together at what is now the Biscuit BBQ restaurant, in Park Slope, Brooklyn, for more than a year, bring their smart update of the obscure compositions of Russ Freeman, Wilbur Harden, and others to a bona-fide jazz shrine.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Frank Stella on the Roof."** Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"Neo Rauch at the Met: Para"** presents new paintings by the Leipzig-based artist. Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"Hidden in Plain Sight."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years"** proves that Serra is not only our greatest sculptor but also an artist whose subject is greatness befitting our time. His recent colossal, complexly curving walls of steel—especially the labyrinthine "Band" and "Sequence," on the museum's second floor—apostrophize the physical and social immensities of twenty-first-century, globalized civilization. Engaging the strolling viewer, body and soul, in a visceral correlative of music, they transcend the truculence of Serra's earlier, menacing "prop" pieces. Hard-headed secular culture can lay no greater claim to spiritual efficacy than it does in this show. Through Sept. 10. ♦ **"Picasso's 'Demoiselles d'Avignon' at 100."** Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Present Tense: Photographs by JoAnn Verburg."** Through Nov. 5. ♦ The latest reinstallation of the museum's permanent collection of photography dispenses with the usual sprawling historical survey in favor of a much more manageable number of groupings, series, and sequences. Organized by the curator Eva Respini, the display reinforces the notion of a MOMA pantheon stretching from Muybridge, Sander, Weston, and Lange to Arbus, Winogrand, Friedlander, and Struth, but, less predictably, it demonstrates how each of these artists worked through themes and variations. Four Ansel Adams photographs of an explosive Old Faithful, six sinuous stairwells by Atget, six Brassaï bar scenes, eight studies of San Francisco hippie youth by William Gedney, and eleven intensely empathetic pictures of Gypsies by Josef Koudelka propose a fresh way of looking at a familiar medium. Through March 3, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8. The museum will be open until 9 on Thursday evenings through Aug. 30.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Shapes of Space."** Through Sept. 5. ♦ **"Richard Pousette-Dart."** Through Sept. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Rudolf Stingel."** Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era."** Through Sept. 16. ♦ **"Resistance Is . . . ."** Through Sept. 2. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ The recently opened Anne and Bernard Spitzer Hall of Human Origins explores the science of evolution. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Let Your Motto Be Resistance: African-American Portraits."** Working with the photography collection of the National Portrait Gallery, the curator Deborah Willis has selected images of famous black abolitionists, politicians, activists, scientists, athletes, writers, and musicians and other performers by a roster of equally notable photographers. The resulting exhibition isn't exactly inspired, but it is often inspiring, and it's sparked by lots of excellent, little-known, and historically important work. Josef Breitenbach's portrait of Sarah Vaughan, eyes closed, mouth open, transported by song, is a high point, but it has plenty of rivals for artistry and vivacity, among them Carl Van Vechten's Bessie Smith, Irving Penn's Jessye Norman, Edward Weston's Langston Hughes, and Doris Ulmann's Paul Robeson. Through Sept. 9. ♦ **"Biographical Landscape: The Photography of Stephen Shore, 1969-79."** Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
1109 Fifth Ave., at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend."** Through Sept. 16. ♦ **"Love and Loss: A Video Trilogy by Neil Goldberg."** Through Oct. 12. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—**"The (S) Files: The Selected Files."** In a wonderfully populist move, El Museo del Barrio curates its 2007 biennial from unsolicited submissions sent over the last two years to the institution's Artists' Archive. The fifty-one participants hail from across the Spanish-speaking world, though most reside in New York; a special installation features five artists living in Ecuador, this year's designated "guest country." One of the Ecuadorians, Pablo Cardoso, contributes what appeared on a recent afternoon to be the overwhelming audience favorite—a suite of three hundred and twenty postcard-size black-and-white paintings, each a double-take-inducing Photo-Realist copy of a snapshot taken through a car windshield or an airplane window, documenting the artist's trip from his home in Ecuador to the Bienal de São Paulo. Through Jan. 8, 2008. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"New York Rises: Photographs by Eugene de Salignac"** mounts around fifty images from an archive of some twenty thousand glass-plate negatives that de Salignac produced during his stint as the official photographer for New York's Department of Bridges/Plant and Structures, from 1906 to 1934. Although most of these vintage photographs are straightforward documents of bridge construction and maintenance, they're far from artless, and a number of them echo or anticipate the work of Eugène Atget, Walker Evans, Weegee, and Danny Lyon. Other images—of accidents, equipment, thronged or deserted streets, and men in topcoats and bowler hats measuring at construction sites—are as fascinating and puzzling as found snapshots. Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"The *Jewish Daily Forward:* Embracing an Immigrant Community."** Through Sept. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Asher B. Durand: Dean of American Landscapes."** Through Jan. 6, 2008. ♦ The second half of the last century catches up with the staid National Academy, as it presents a primer on what used to be called nonobjective painting. **"The Abstract Impulse: Fifty Years of Abstraction at the National Academy, 1954–2006"** divides forty-seven works among three sections, examining gestural, geometric, and "introspective" compositions, while acknowledging that these categories are not mutually exclusive. Minor endeavors by some major talents are on hand, among them Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, Jules Olitski, and Milton Resnick; there's also a beautiful suite of sculpturally folded white-on-white prints made in 1972 by the ever-inventive Dorothea Rockburne. Through Jan.

6, 2008. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Berlin Street Scene."** Through Sept. 17. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"David Adjaye: Making Public Buildings"** is a remarkably absorbing show of models, photographs, and videos that explore work, mostly in London, by the Tanzanian-British architect. Displays relate Adjaye's light-loving, lyrically hospitable buildings to African vernacular themes. Comparison of his renovation of the Nobel Peace Center, in Oslo, with a tribal village, at once packed and open, is sharply revelatory. Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"Midnight's Daydream"** presents works by participants in the museum's 2006-07 artists-in-residence program: Titus Kaphar, who copies and vandalizes Old Master paintings to make political points; Wardell Milan II, whose drawings and collages of boxers in action find delicacy in violence; and Demetrius Oliver, an impressively gifted trickster in the vein of David Hammons. Oliver's subtle provocations include constellation charts that replace stars with fur and forty-four photos of enigmatic studio interiors, captured, fish-eye-like, as reflections in a silver teapot. The teapot is here, too, emitting a whistle that, you come to realize, is human-made. Through Oct. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: Many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

ROXY PAINE
Walking toward Madison Square Park on a sunny day, one first glimpses Paine's three stainless-steel sculptures as clinical glints of metal flickering between leaves. Up close, his towering metal trees—around forty feet tall—and huge boulders look like mutant prostheses on the body of nature. "Defunct" is a giant dead tree, its limbs cracked and broken; "Conjoined" presents a pair of leafless but apparently thriving Siamese-twin trees, their branches seamlessly intertwined; the double boulders in "Erratic" look like gleaming remnants of some industrial glacier. Through Dec. 31. (Madison Square Park, Fifth Ave. at 23rd St. 212-538-9310.)

"CLASSIC BEAUTY: PART 2"
As a follow-up to last summer's show devoted to photographs of the female nude, the gallery switches genders to focus on the male of the species. Again, the work is wide-ranging, both historically and stylistically, but significant artists (von Gloeden, Platt Lynes, Horst, Mapplethorpe) aren't always represented by significant images, and the classical ideal flirts shamelessly with kitsch iconography. That flirtation produces some of the show's most arresting shots, however, including Bruce of Los Angeles's rear view of a sturdy Joe Dallesandro, not long before he joined the crew at Warhol's Factory, and Herb Ritts's glamour portrait of the Olympian Greg Louganis in a black Speedo. Through Sept. 15. (Throckmorton, 145 E. 57th St. 212-223-1059.)

Note: In a listing for the show "Text Messages" in last week's issue, the artist Alice Attie was misidentified.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

"NEO-INTEGRITY"
It would be folly to name just a handful of artists in this show, curated by the painter Keith Mayerson, since close to two hundred contributed work. Better to preserve the democratic spirit—what Mayerson calls the "kumbaya atmosphere." Many names will be familiar to contemporary-art mavens, but just as many will not. Prominent artists are shoehorned into the gallery's modest digs

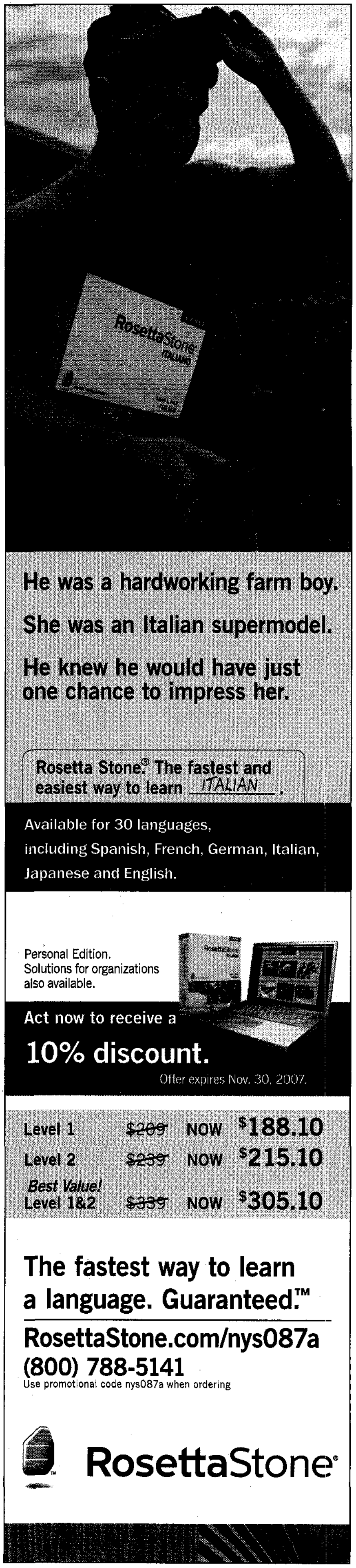
TABLES FOR TWO
CAFÉ ST. BART'S

109 E. 50th St. (212-593-3333)—Among the skyscrapers that dominate Park Avenue just north of Grand Central Terminal, the Byzantine Romanesque fantasy of St. Bartholomew's Church, with its dome, arches, and rose windows, looms as an unexpected outcrop of curves. A few years ago, it occurred to someone that the church's gated terrace would make a nice spot for lunch or a beer. Terrace restaurants tend to fight shy of culinary fireworks, but this year the café has reopened under the management of the food-service giant Sodexho. Clearly aiming to fancy the joint up a little, Sodexho has appointed Matthew Weingarten, formerly of Savoy, as a "consulting chef," to overhaul the menu, and is building him a big new kitchen for a year-round indoor restaurant at the site, to open later in the year.

For now, the restaurant attempts to straddle the divide between casual and upmarket. At lunch, the menu offers individual items like lobster rolls and pizzas, and a two-course prix fixe. On balance, the casual option seems better. Sitting at the twenty-seat circular bar, you find yourself to the right of two blue-shirted, signet-ringed men tearing into hamburgers with smoked-onion rémoulade and saying things like "I like Romney: his business record is impressive" and to the left of a pair of women judiciously leaving half their B.L.T.s and saying things like "I've always dated older men." It's a Friday, and everyone seems to have ordered Pinot Grigio.

In the evenings, the neighborhood is more or less deserted, and the restaurant, bustling at lunch, must rely on a few tourists wandering in by mistake. Nonetheless, the kitchen's ambition produces a successful *crudo* of wild king salmon, which exploits the buttery taste of salmon belly, and a beautifully cooked trout laced with an *agrodolce* sauce. But things have a way of going wrong, too, as with a dish of oily sturgeon and watery grilled vegetables. And the small number of diners might have something to do with an even more absent staff. On a recent evening, three tables left in frustration at the wait, a confused server orbited the entire terrace with an order of pork before returning with it to the kitchen, and, as night descended, it seemed that the only satisfied diners would be the mosquitoes. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $14-$32.)

—Leo Carey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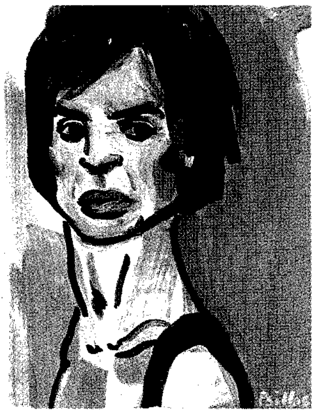
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
OUT OF THE EAST

Rudolf Nureyev was only twenty-three when he walked away from his K.G.B. handlers at a Paris airport and asked the French police for asylum. "Nureyev: The Russian Years," slated for airing on PBS's "Great Performances" on Aug. 29, fills us in on his prior life. The text is occasionally soupy, but in the old performance footage, some of it never released before, we can see the beginnings of his very individual style, notably the hyperstretched torso. (This was considered effeminate when he introduced it. Now it is standard.) It also shows the technical faults resulting from his late training. Nureyev was born poor and provincial. In offstage films, we see him in shabby clothes, with a haircut that looks as if it had been chewed by a dog. He realized early, he said, that "nobody's going to . . . take me by hand and do, or show me anything. I had to do it all myself." That ardor, above all, is what the films show. The program also offers good dish on Nureyev's early love life, and it makes his defection as exciting as a police drama.

—*Joan Acocella*



alongside emerging practitioners. No salient style, medium, or sensibility dominates, but a consensus emerges: community beats competition, and artistic integrity is an antidote to the overheated market. Through Aug. 24. (Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411.)

"1950S–1960S KINETIC ABSTRACTION"
Sculptures and reliefs that move, literally, advanced a frail international style—a sort of aesthetic Esperanto—that stood against New Yorkish hegemony in Europe and South America. Advised by the collector Erika Hoffmann, the gallery has convened motorized or air-stirred items by eight artists, including Jean Tinguely, Jésus Rafaël Soto, Julio Le Parc, and François Morellet. Like Op art, the mode favors impersonal sensation. At best, as in the shifting moiré effects of Soto's painted bands and dangling horizontal strips, it attains an austere charm. Hoffmann writes that, for her, the works "reflect the very essence of life, of social as well as cosmic energy." The earnestness of that ambition—or wish—casts a poignant sidelight on the epoch of Pop and minimalism. Through Aug. 23. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

"STUBBORN MATERIALS"
Most of the artists in this show were born in America in the seventies, which positions it as an essay on the current Zeitgeist. Refreshingly, the statement it makes about young artists' preoccupations is convincing without being portentous, ironic, or abject. Junky materials predominate—a dead cricket, a cast-urethane rock, aluminum foil, old surf photographs, insulation foam, flocked wallpaper, mirrored glass—as do highly formal configurations, such as Ian Pedigo's fraying rattan beach mat collaged with newsprint and mounted on the wall, or Rosy Keyser's splat of house paint and sawdust on canvas. The show, which was curated by Simone Subal, takes a stance that is witty, restrained, and ambitious. Through Aug. 25. (Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055.)

"SUBSTANCE & SURFACE"
This is the kind of show that drives some people crazy: monochrome "paintings" made from an ink-soaked towel (Paul Lee), perforated Masonite (John Armleder), and "Malibu sand" glued to paper (Eric Wesley). It's also the kind of show that a certain breed of art lovers adore, with works by provocateurs like Mike Kelley, Jim Lambie, and Piero Manzoni. Ultimately, it's not just about separating the men from the boys (sadly, Ghada Amer is the sole woman represented) or the minimalists from the maximalists; it's about stripping art down, and proposing—if such a thing is still possible—a new list of essentials. Through Aug. 28. (Bortolami, 510 W. 25th St. 212-727-2050.)

Short List

"CIRCA 70": Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Aug. 31. **"EASY RIDER":** Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610. Through Sept. 8. **"LATE LIBERTIES":** Connelly, 625 W. 27th St. 212-337-9563. Through Aug 24.

DANCE

DOWNTOWN DANCE FESTIVAL
The long-running festival of free summer performances, featuring nineteen companies, has two parts. During the week, the various participants present daily lunchtime exhibitions in Chase Plaza; on the weekend, they gather for two mammoth afternoon shows in Battery Park. This year, the lunchtime performances include an audience-participation element in which kids are taught segments of the dances. The companies of Christopher Caines, Janis Brenner, and Takehiro Ueyama join the Lisbon-based Quorum Ballet, Indian troupes, and martial-arts mavericks. (Aug. 22-24 at noon: Chase Plaza, Nassau St. between Liberty and Pine Sts. Aug. 25-26 at 1: The Lawn at Battery Park, State St. at Pearl St. For a complete schedule, visit www.batterydance.org.)

"ACCOUNTING FOR CUSTOMS"
"Sitelines," the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's site-specific summer performance series, brings together the Brooklyn choreographer Reggie Wilson and the Senegal-based dancemaker Andreya Ouamba on the steps of the former U.S. Custom House, at Bowling Green. Their collaboration, danced by Wilson's Fist and Heel Performance Group, uses the site's history to explore the preservation of memory and the interplay of tradition and innovation throughout the African diaspora. (212-219-9401. Aug. 22-25 at 12:30 and 1:30.)

NEW YORK BAROQUE DANCE COMPANY
As part of Lincoln Center's free "Out of Doors" series, this New York troupe, which is devoted to the re-creation of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social and theatrical dance—think allemande and gavotte—performs a suite of love duets and ensemble pieces in full period costume. The dancers' carriage is aristocratic, the legs are never raised particularly high, and the jumps are modest. (Josie Robertson Plaza. 212-546-2656. Aug. 22 at 6.)

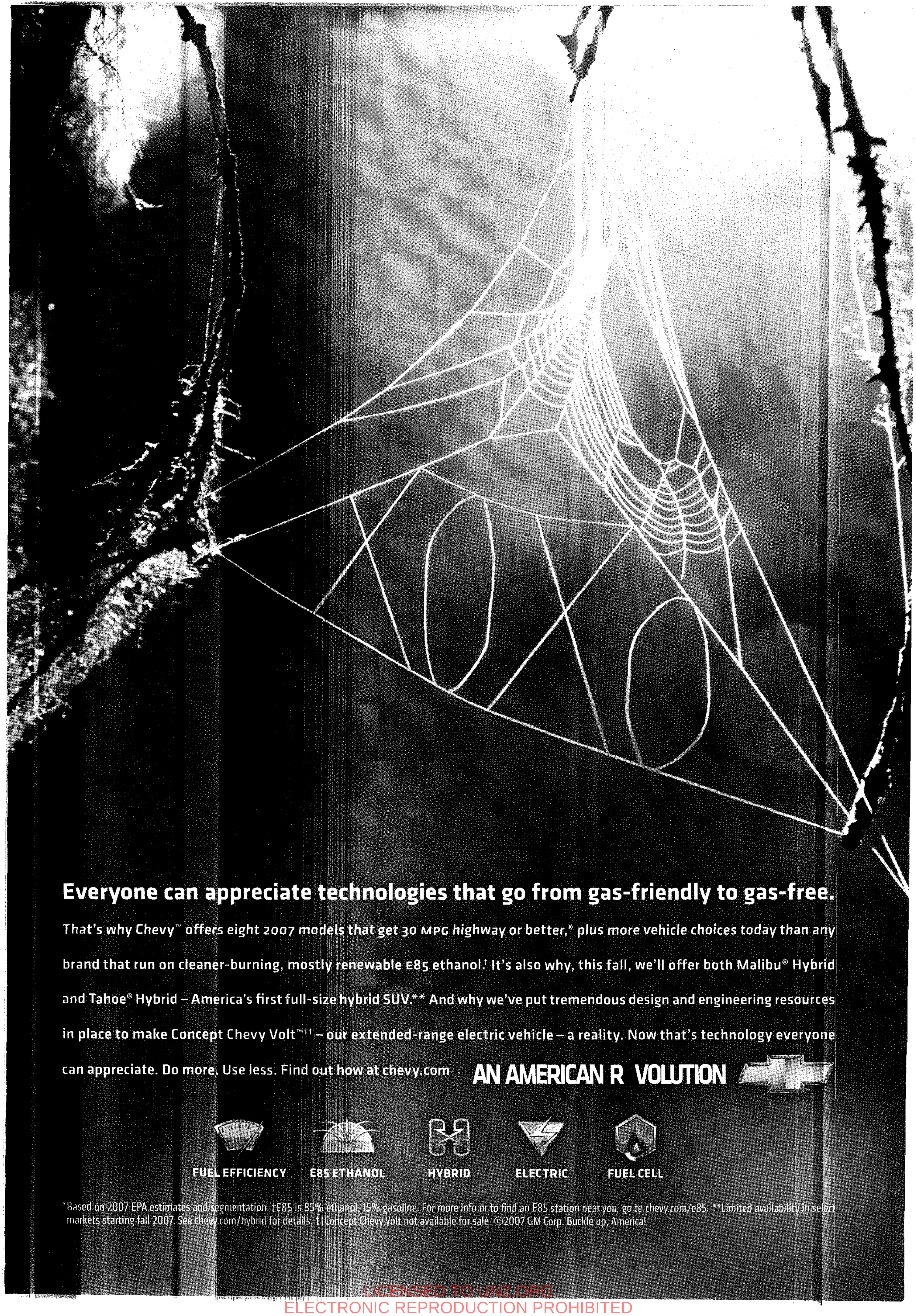
"60S SNAPSHOTS"
As part of its nineteen-sixties theme, Lincoln Center's "Out of Doors" series has commissioned new works by choreographers who were around then or who are now inspired by that decade's experiments. Gus Solomons, Jr., brings "Random Funny Walks," Merián Soto offers a group improvisation about flower children, and Yoshiko Chuma stages a parade of 1967 fashions along a fifty-foot-long red carpet. Each fifteen-minute piece is performed twice, in rotation, then Elaine Summers finishes the evening with video and fog, in "Hidden Forests." (South Plaza. 212-546-2656. Aug. 23 at 6.)

"STATES AND RESEMBLANCE"
"Sitelines" presents a collaboration between the Japanese video artist and actor Ryutaro Mishima, the Indonesian mask-maker Restu Imansari Kusumaningrum, and the New York choreographer and video artist Dean Moss. The work, which will be performed at the Elevated Acre, on Water Street, is a meditation on transformation and death. The performers meander through a field of black disks, interacting in surreal ways and creating dynamic shadows; at different times, one of them dons a mask or traces delicate patterns in the air with a fan. In the background, Caetano Veloso's lilting, silvery voice wafts in and out, as in a dream. (55 Water St., at Old Slip. 212-219-9401. Aug. 27-28 at 7. Through Sept. 6.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
Long before the Pillow became a dance mecca, its site was a station on the Underground Railroad. "Invisible Wings," an outdoor performance created at the Pillow by Joanna Haigood in 1998 and reprised Aug. 21-22 and Aug. 24-25, vividly recreates the history of slaves making a run for freedom in the nineteenth century. At dusk, audience members walk the grounds, accompanied by a narrator and a choir, as scenes of brutality, struggle, endurance, and escape play out in song, dance, and storytelling. ♦ Aug. 22-26, in the Ted Shawn Theatre, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, now celebrating its thirtieth anniversary, presents a diverse program spanning a wide range of contemporary American and European choreography. Highlights include Twyla Tharp's witty and elegantly profound "Baker's Dozen," set to Willie (the Lion) Smith's jazz piano pieces; the Israeli-born Ohad Naharin's "Passomezzo"; Susan Marshall's aerial duet "Kiss"; Nacho Duato's "Gnawa" (set to infectious North African music); and "Lickety-Split," by Alejandro Cerrudo, a Hubbard Street company member. ♦ In the Doris Duke Theatre Aug. 23-26, the Bebe Miller Dance Company presents the cryptic "Landing/Place." It's a multimediafest, with a live computer score by Albert Mathias, projected animation, and motion-capture video. Flashes of fluid partnering, moments of connection, and spots of warmth, such

DEMETRIOS PSILLOS

**Everyone can appreciate technologies that go from gas-friendly to gas-free.**

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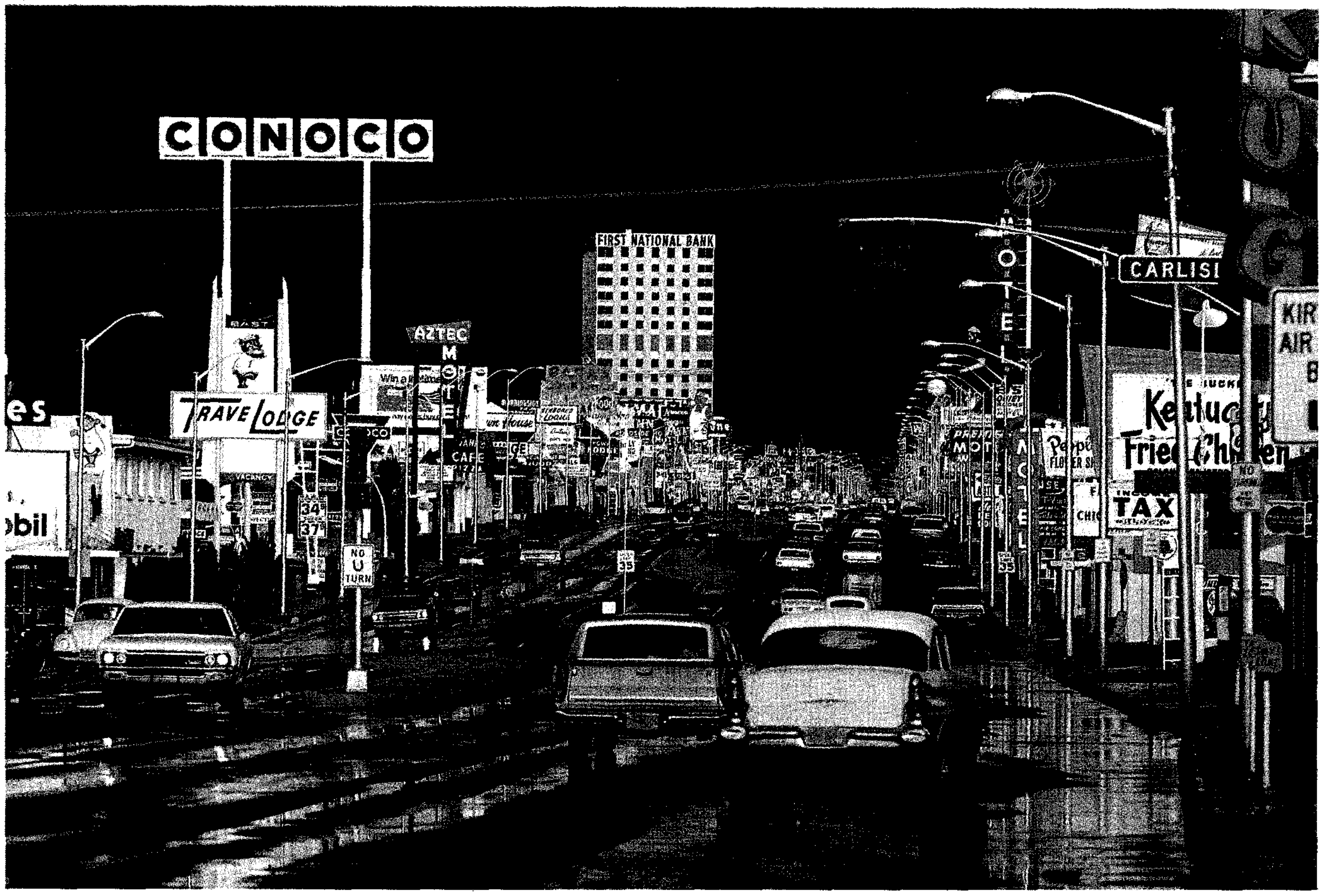

Ernst Haas's photograph "Route 66, Albuquerque, New Mexico 1969," in "Easy Rider," at Richardson.

as when the dancers bounce joyfully while sucking on lemons, get lost in the overburdened meandering. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA OF THE AMERICAS

The young Mexican conductor Alondra de la Parra founded this enterprising ensemble to give exposure to talented performers and composers from Latin America. She brings her musicians (and the Puerto Rican tenor Joel Prietro Leon) to the Museo del Barrio for a concert that ranges through arias by Mozart, Rossini, and Donizetti, songs by Astor Piazzolla and Rafael Hernandez, and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. (Fifth Ave. at 104th St. 212-564-0508. Aug. 21 at 7.)

LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS: "SUMMER OF LOVE"

Lincoln Center lets its hair down in this annual series, and the classical department is no exception: both concerts this week are fronted by legendary figures from the experimentalist vanguard of the nineteen-sixties. Aug. 21 at 8: Pauline Oliveros's concerts are meditative, unfolding experiences in which audience participation—or capitulation—is vital. Her latest will be a two-part event featuring a "sound-a-long," in which the voices of the audience will be combined via radio link with those of participants worldwide, followed by a performance with her group Ehres mixing acoustic and electronic sounds with spoken recitation. ♦ Aug. 22 at 7 and 7:45: Before the French spectralist composers made spatial music stylish, there was the craggy American pioneer Henry Brant, whose efforts were finally recognized with a Pulitzer Prize in 2002. "Dormant Craters" features the Manhattan School of Music Percussion Ensemble (along with Gamelan Son of Lion) performing on drums, bells, wood blocks, and an assortment of everyday household items. Neely Bruce conducts. (Lincoln Center South Plaza, 62nd St. behind the New York State Theatre. No tickets required.)

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL

Lincoln Center's August mainstay comes to a close with a sequence of stirring concerts. Aug. 21-22 at 8: Osmo Vänskä, the invigorating conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra, sits in on clarinet with members of the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra in Mozart's Serenade No. 11 in E-Flat Major before leading them in Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with Joshua Bell) and Beethoven's First Symphony. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 22 at 10:30: In his festival début, the pianist Stephen Prutsman takes to the intimate Kaplan Penthouse for a solo recital in which preludes and fugues from Book II of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier are interwoven with brief works by Osvaldo Golijov, Ravel ("Une Barque sur l'Océan"), Scriabin, and himself. ♦ Aug. 23 at 8: Frans Brüggen and his superb Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century make their Mostly Mozart débuts with Schubert's Eighth and Ninth Symphonies. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St.) ♦ Aug. 24-25 at 8: This year's festival, ostensibly in honor of the boy genius of Salzburg, has sometimes seemed more like Mostly Beethoven or Mostly Golijov. But the road will close with Mozart's beloved Requiem (along with a selection of Hispanic a-cappella works), performed by the festival orchestra, the Schola Cantorum de Venezuela, and an impressive lineup of soloists that includes the soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian and the tenor Matthew Polenzani. Louis Langrée conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall.) (212-721-6500.)

MUSIC AT THE FRICK COLLECTION

The Rossetti String Quartet, a group increasingly renowned for its lyrical style and refulgent sound, offers quartets by Mozart (K. 575, in D Major), Dvořák (the commanding Op. 105, in A-Flat Major), and Ravel in the museum's aristocratic auditorium. (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. Aug. 22 at 6.)

BARGEMUSIC

Aug. 22 at 8: A rich week at the barge begins with a recital by the pianist Katya Mihailova, performing Shostakovich's "Three Fantastic Dances" (his startlingly mature Op. 5) along with works evoking the four seasons by Tchaikovsky and Piazzolla. ♦ Aug. 24 at 8: NYCQ, a string quartet of young émigrés from the former Soviet Union formed by the cellist Adrian Daurov, offers a concert of Russian gems—Stravinsky's Concertino, Myaskovsky's Quartet No. 9, and Tchaikovsky's radiant Quartet No. 1 in D Major. ♦ Aug. 25 at 8: The Amernet String Quartet gives a preview performance of its Maverick Concerts program (see Out of Town). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full listing, see www.bargemusic.org.)

OUT OF TOWN

TANGLEWOOD

The legendary festival's final concerts of the season are designed to please. Aug. 21 at 8:30: The Dutch maestro Frans Brüggen emerged as an authentic-performance expert a quarter century ago, and he and his ensemble—the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century—have remained eminent in the field. The first of their two concerts at Ozawa Hall is devoted to Schubert's Eighth ("Unfinished") and Ninth Symphonies. ♦ Aug. 22 at 8:30: Brüggen and his band return for an all-Beethoven program: the "Coriolan" Overture, the Fourth Piano Concerto (with the magnetic young keyboardist Kristian Bezuidenhout), and the Fifth Symphony. ♦ Aug. 25 at 8:30: The season concludes with another pair of concerts, this time with the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra. The first, a tribute to the director David Lean, is conducted by John Williams; scenes from such epic films as "Lawrence of Arabia" and "Doctor Zhivago" will be shown along with the music written for them. (Williams will also conduct selections from his scores for the "Harry Potter" movies.) ♦ Aug. 26 at 2:30: Keith Lockhart conducts the orchestra in an all-Gershwin program, in which a renowned group of artists—including the pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet and the Broadway stars Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell—

perform “Rhapsody in Blue,” “An American in Paris,” and selections from the classic Gershwin songbook. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

BERKSHIRE OPERA COMPANY: "LA BOHÈME"
Maureen O'Flynn (as Mimì) heads the cast in a staged production, with orchestra, of Puccini's timeless Latin Quarter romance; Kathleen Kelly conducts. (Colonial Theatre, Pittsfield, Mass. 413-997-4444. Aug. 22 and Aug. 24 at 8 and Aug. 26 at 2.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
Michael MacLeod's first season as the company's general and artistic director concludes the way it began, with a selection of operas inspired by the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Aug. 23 at 8 and Aug. 25 at 1:30: Monteverdi's **“Orfeo,”** with Michael Slattery in the title role and with Megan Monahan as Euridice; Antony Walker conducts. ♦ Aug. 24 at 8 and Aug. 27 at 2: Philip Glass's **“Orphée,”** the first of his operas to be presented by the company, is based on the film by Jean Cocteau. Philip Cutlip and Lisa Saffer, two superb advocates for the composer, take the leading roles; Anne Manson. ♦ Aug. 25 at 8 and Aug. 28 at 2: Gluck's **“Orphée et Eurydice,”** presented in the Romantic-era adaptation by Berlioz and featuring Michael Maniaci and Amanda Pabyan; Julian Wachner. ♦ Aug. 26 at 2: A delightfully naughty (and musically persuasive) production of Offenbach's **“Orpheus in the Underworld,”** with the fine veterans Joyce Castle and Jake Gardner joining such impressive newcomers as Marc Heller and Joélle Harvey; Jean-Marie Zeitouni. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255. These are the final performances.)

CHESTNUT HILL CONCERTS
Chamber-music fans on the Connecticut shoreline need not head upstate to hear fine performances; this series, curated by the cellist Ronald Thomas, offers concerts at the First Congregational Church of Madison on the town green. The baritone Chris Pedro Trakas and the pianist Mihae Lee will join a group of eminent string players—including Thomas, the principal cellist of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and Cynthia Phelps, the principal violist of the New York Philharmonic—for a program featuring music by Schumann (“Dichterliebe”), Mendelssohn, and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in A Major). (Madison, Conn. 203-245-5736. Aug. 24 at 8.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
Aug. 25 at 6: The Rossetti String Quartet, fresh from its Frick Collection concert, performs quartets by Haydn (Op. 20, No. 5 in F Minor), Mozart, and Dvořák. ♦ Aug. 26 at 3: In “Mahler and Friends: Unfinished Business,” the Amernet String Quartet, a fresh and engaging American group, offers performances of the young Mahler's one-movement Piano Quartet, the elder Grieg's autumnal, two-movement Second Quartet, and Brahms's Piano Quintet, that great summer standby; the pianist James Tocco is its guest. (Woodstock, N.Y. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
The St. Petersburg String Quartet—one of the longtime festival's most distinguished guests—eschews Russian repertory in a concert (with the pianist Alexander Mekinulov) featuring works by Mozart (the limpid Duo for Violin and Viola in G Major), Brahms, and Schumann (the Piano Quartet). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Aug. 26 at 3.)

MOVIES OPENING

DEDICATION
A romantic comedy, directed by Justin Theroux, about a misogynistic children's book writer (Billy Crudup) who must work with a woman illustrator (Mandy Moore). Opening Aug. 24. (Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.)

DEEP WATER
A documentary, directed by Louise Osmond and Jerry Rothwell, about Donald Crowhurst, a man who tried to sail around the world in 1968 and vanished. Opening Aug. 24. (Angelika Film Center.)

GOOD LUCK CHUCK
A man who gets dumped by women for the men they go on to marry decides to rent himself out as a good-luck charm. Directed by Mark Helfrich; starring Dane Cook and Jessica Alba. Opening Aug. 24. (In wide release.)

HANNAH TAKES THE STAIRS
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Aug. 22. (IFC Center.)

THE HOTTEST STATE
Ethan Hawke directed this drama, based on his novel, about an actor (Mark Webber) in a difficult relationship with a songwriter (Catalina Sandino Moreno). Opening Aug. 24. (Sunshine Cinema and Clearview Chelsea 9.)

ILLEGAL TENDER
A crime drama, directed by Franc. Reyes, about a young man and his mother, who are being pursued by the gangsters who killed his father. Opening Aug. 24. (In wide release.)

MR. BEAN'S HOLIDAY
In this comedy sequel, Mr. Bean (Rowan Atkinson) wins a trip to the South of France. Directed by Steve Bendelack. Opening Aug. 24. (In wide release.)

THE NANNY DIARIES
An adaptation of the novel by Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus, written and directed by Shari Springer and Robert Pulcini, starring Scarlett Johansson as a college student who takes care of a rich family's children. Co-starring Paul Giamatti and Laura Linney as the employers. Opening Aug. 24. (In wide release.)

RESURRECTING THE CHAMP
A sportswriter (Josh Hartnett) meets a homeless man (Samuel L. Jackson) and finds out that he's a boxing legend believed to have died. Directed by Rod Lurie. Opening Aug. 24. (In wide release.)

RIGHT AT YOUR DOOR
In this thriller, directed by Chris Gorak, the residents of Los Angeles cope with the aftermath of a dirty bomb. Opening Aug. 24. (Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.)

SEPTEMBER DAWN
A historical drama about a violent confrontation between Western settlers and Mormons. Directed by Christopher Cain. Starring Dean Cain, Lolita Davidovich, Terence Stamp, and Jon Voight. Opening Aug. 24. (In wide release.)

WAR
An F.B.I. agent seeks revenge after his family and partner are killed. Directed by Phillip Atwell; starring Devon Aoki, John Lone, Jet Li, and Jason Statham. Opening Aug. 24. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

BECOMING JANE
Like much period drama, Julian Jarrold's film aims at bookish and edifying diversion, but in this instance you cannot miss, beneath the polite exchanges and the tuneful dances, the rustling of desperation. Jarrold and his screenwriters, Kevin Hood and Sarah Williams, have decided to treat the life of Jane Austen (Anne Hathaway) as if it were itself the plot of an undiscovered Austen novel, albeit a second-rate one. Jane, stuck in the bosom of her family, meets a boisterous Irishman, Lefroy (James McAvoy), who scoffs at her unripe prose, praises “Tom Jones” instead, and thereby wins her heart. The pair attempt to elope, but fail, and the broken affair duly inspires our authoress to write. This is not just pure speculation but heavy anachronism; Hathaway smolders like a late-Romantic heroine and looks like a twenty-first-century model. (Anna Maxwell Martin, who plays Jane's sister Cassandra, would have been a neater fit for the lead.) Yet the ending, which contrives a meeting between the near-lovers in middle age, feels touched by true regret. With Julie Walters and Maggie Smith, as you might expect.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/13/07.) (In wide release.)

THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM
Matt Damon, looking more like a bullet than ever—short hair, blunt nose, no stubble—returns as the out-in-the-cold C.I.A. agent Jason Bourne, who carried out illegal assassinations for the agency, which now wants to get rid of him. As before, agency powers sit at a bank of computers tracking Bourne (who may be a thousand miles away) while he tries to evade their gaze as well as the goons, some

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working for the C.I.A. and some not, who want to kill him. Eventually, he gets himself in a position to survey the surveyors and hunt the hunters, but all he wants is the return of his identity, which was filched from him during his training. The director, Paul Greengrass (who also made the second film in the series, "The Bourne Supremacy"), composes the movie in tiny fragments, but we see what we need to see, and the result is pretty nearly always thrilling. Some of the chase sequences go on for as long as ten minutes. With David Strathairn and Joan Allen as agency bigwigs. The screenplay, vaguely suggested by Robert Ludlum's novels, is credited to Tony Gilroy (who has worked on the entire series) and many other writers.—*David Denby* (8/6/07) (In wide release.)

DELIRIOUS

There are glitches in the narrative, but otherwise this is a tough, acid, truth-telling New York independent film, written and directed by Tom DiCillo, about an aging paparazzo, Les (Steve Buscemi), and Toby (Michael Pitt), the good-looking street kid whom he makes his assistant. Les teaches Toby how to crash parties, cadge or steal goody bags, and other necessary skills; they live together, but spiritually they are homeless, two lost men desperately hanging on to the edges of the fast life. The movie bears more than a casual resemblance to "Midnight Cowboy," with touches of "A Star Is Born" thrown in. The street kid, who wants to be an actor, moves up the celebrity ladder quickly with the help of a casting director (Gina Gershon) and a troubled pop star (Alison Lohman) who take a fancy to him, but he leaves his mentor behind.—*D.D.* (8/20/07) (Angelika Film Center and 62nd & Broadway.)

THE DEVIL IS A WOMAN

Directed by Josef von Sternberg in 1935 and starring Marlene Dietrich, this is the most famous version of "La Femme et le Pantin," Pierre Louÿs's short novel about a femme fatale, published in 1898. It was filmed earlier with Geraldine Farrar (1920) and with Conchita Montenegro (1929), and after the von Sternberg movie it was filmed in 1958, by Julien Duvivier under the title "A Woman Like Satan," starring Brigitte Bardot, and then in 1977 by Buñuel, as "That Obscure Object of Desire," with two actresses playing the leading role. It's a story of obsessive love, and von Sternberg's version is certainly obsessive. There's a slightly crazy daringness about his approach to the mythic. (You're never invited into the heroine's state of mind.) The film's near-abstract decorative quality has the fascination of a folly. With Lionel Atwill, Cesar Romero, Alison Skipworth, Edward Everett Horton, Don Alvarado, Hank Mann, and Edwin Maxwell. Von Sternberg was credited as both director and photographer, with Lucien Ballard as assistant photographer; John Dos Passos and S. K. Winston were the scenarists; Hans Dreier was the art director.—*Pauline Kael* (Thalia Theatre.)

HAIRSPRAY

The movie version of the hit musical (itself based on John Waters's 1988 film) is perfectly pleasant but not as exhilarating as the show, which distilled our nostalgia for the candied period between Elvis's early work and the arrival of the Beatles. The director of the movie, Adam Shankman, and the screenwriter, Leslie Dixon, have removed the traces of camp and blue humor that gave the stage show its happily knowing flavor. As before, Tracy Turnblad (Nikki Blonsky), a chubby Baltimore teen-ager in 1962, lives to dance and to make out with the sweet, good-looking school king (Zac Efron), and much of the movie feels like a prolonged platter party. The dance numbers, however, are unimaginatively shot, and the idea of substituting John Travolta for Harvey Fierstein as Tracy's hefty mother, Edna (played by the outrageous Divine in Waters's original version), is a blandly earnest betrayal—Travolta gives a sincere, unfunny performance as a Baltimore housewife. With Michelle Pfeiffer in an amusing turn as the hypocritical shrew who manages a local TV station, and Christopher Walken, gruff and tender, as Tracy's father.—*D.D.* (7/23/07) (In wide release.)

HANNAH TAKES THE STAIRS

The director Joe Swanberg's tightly structured but loosely performed independent romantic comedy is "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" for the post-slacker age. Hannah (Greta Gerwig), a brainstormer for a bunch of twenty-somethings working in a slouchy office on some sort of TV show, makes the rounds of three men—Mike (Mark Duplass), who quit his job on a whim and wants her to have more fun; her colleague Paul (Andrew Bujalski), the artistic star of the team, whose blog is being considered for publication as a book; and another co-worker, Matt (Kent Osborne), an introverted, mild-mannered dreamer who is Paul's best friend. As the thoughtful and self-deprecating Hannah, Gerwig pulls off postgraduate intellectual musings as if she means them, and Bujalski, who directed "Funny Ha Ha" (this film's prime forebear), is, like most good directors, a natural actor. Swanberg (who is both the cinematographer and the director) brings his story to life in ironic images that reflect his conflicting desires for pictorial solidity and fluid responsiveness to nuance. Though his dialogue, spoken with the charming hesitation of inexperienced improvisers, conveys the tensions of the postcollegiate proletariat caught between big dreams and petty realities, Swanberg most faithfully captures the sound of artistic creativity today in bursts of tapping on laptop keyboards.—*Richard Brody* (IFC Center.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

The fifth and longest of J. K. Rowling's fantasy books gets the shortest running time, in the director David Yates's economical take on the boy wizard. By focussing the story on Harry (a leaner and slightly meaner Daniel Radcliffe) and his exploits, Yates dispenses with many of the novel's subplots and is able to push the story forward, ominously foreshadowing the dark times to come. The cleanly delivered story line has the evil Lord Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes) gathering his henchmen to let loose his powers, while Harry tries to convince those around him that Voldemort is on the march. There are three great treats in this installment of the Potter franchise: Harry's first kiss; the ethereal Luna Lovegood (Evanna Lynch, who won the part in a contest and is extraordinarily good); and the horrid new Professor of the Dark Arts, Dolores Umbridge, played by Imelda Staunton, whose scene-stealing, fascinatingly nasty performance is among the best in the series.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

MY CHILDHOOD

Bill Douglas made the three sections of his autobiographical triptych over the course of seven years, with the same actors in the crucial roles; their aging (along with the director's stark and compressed images) gives you a jolting sense of life taking shape before your eyes. This first film, from 1972, begins near the end of the Second World War, in a poor Scottish mining town where Jamie, Douglas's surrogate, lives with his older half brother and their grandmother in a barren one-room apartment. Jamie's parents aren't missing, only absent—his mother institutionalized, his father unwilling to acknowledge his bastard except in private. As the boy journeys to young adulthood, Douglas gets at the mix of heredity, chance, and imitation which goes into the molding of character. Jamie sees and feels things with a brutal purity, and by the end of the trilogy his aesthetic impulse has given his life its own direction. There's no gap between his vision and the style of this fierce, inspiring demonstration of the restorative power of art.—*Michael Sragow* (Anthology Film Archives; Aug. 24-26.)

NO END IN SIGHT

The best documentary on the Iraq occupation made so far. This modest, attentive, and outraged collection of interviews, news footage, and narrated history gathers weight and strength and delivers, in chronological order, an overwhelming pattern of folly: In the run-up to the 2003 invasion and in the months

DVD NOTES
THE FIRST WAVE

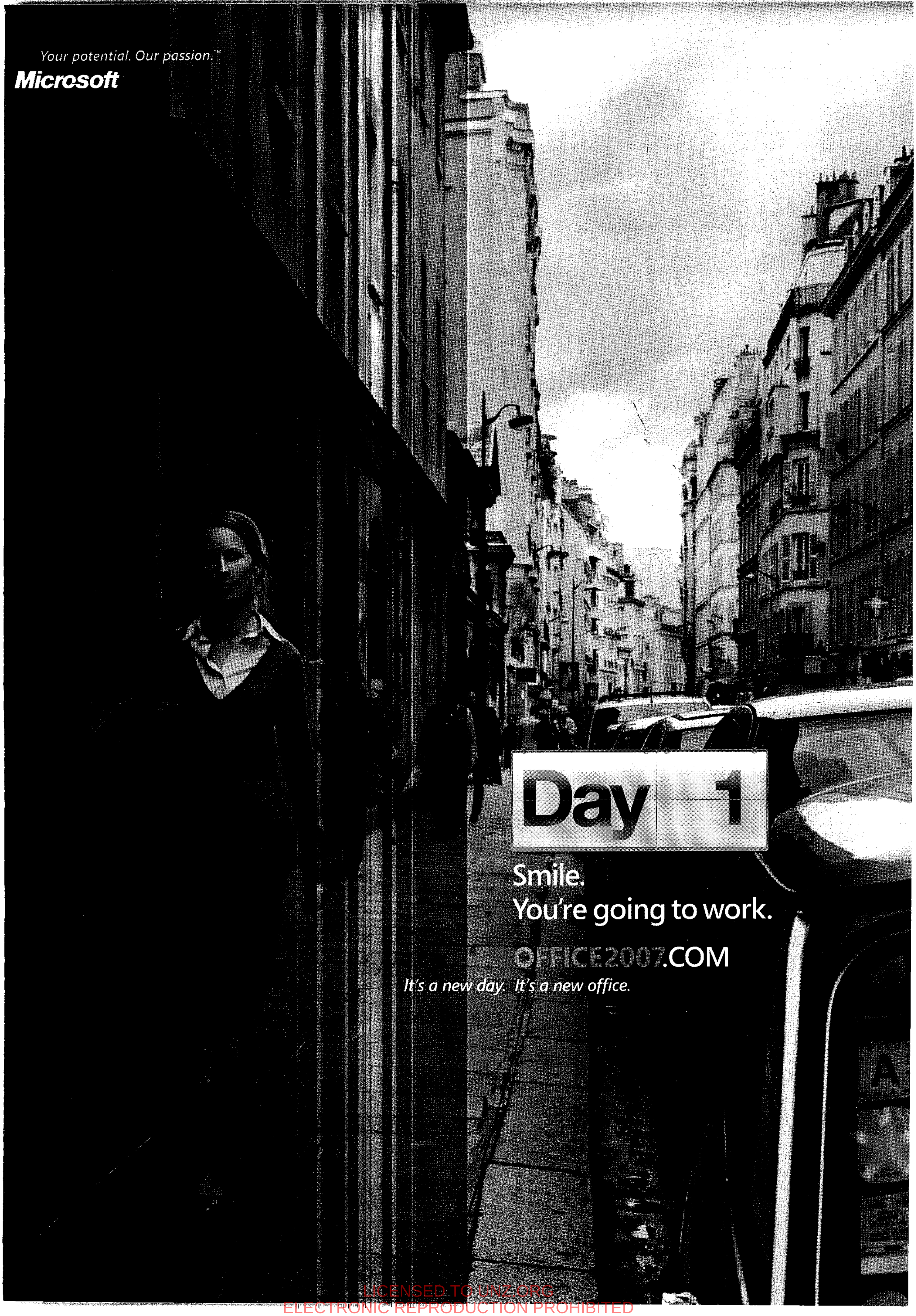
A decade before the revelation of the French New Wave, movie magazines and *ciné-clubs* proliferated and no-budget filmmaking became, as one existentialist acolyte put it, "the medium of choice." The wide-ranging styles and ideas that were in the Parisian air are on view in new DVD releases from two of that era's pioneers, Isidore Isou and Jean-Pierre Melville.

Isou, whose "Venom and Eternity," from 1951, is now available in Kino's **"Avant-Garde 2"** set, was a Romanian Jewish immigrant (born Ioan-Isidor Goldstein) who burst onto the postwar scene as a scandal-mongering provocateur and founded a movement called Lettrism. His big idea was to transcend meaning by dissolving words: he made poems out of inchoate vocal eruptions such as gurgles and screams. He was also a movie buff who, in 1950, started work on a film. Part artistic manifesto, part autobiography, it concerns an aspiring filmmaker and serial seducer, Daniel, whose story is told in a voice-over set to rhythmic nonsense chanting by the Lettrist Choir. After a *ciné-club* screening, Daniel stands up and expounds his credo—to "neutralize" the images and give priority to "a novel recited in the cinema"—which Isou accompanies with amateurish shots of himself, a handsome, hangdog bohemian on the streets of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, as well as found footage from industrial films and travelogues and home movies of such literary celebrities as Jean Cocteau and Blaise Cendrars, which he degraded with scratches and fingerprints. The movie ends with Daniel's surprisingly modern metacommentary on the film. Eric Rohmer wrote a lengthy appreciation of "Venom and Eternity," and Jean-Luc Godard defended the project in private, but Isou never made another film. He died on July 28, at the age of eighty-two.

Jean-Pierre Melville (né Grumbach) came to the cinema from the other side. Born in Paris in 1917, he was a lifelong movie fanatic. He took Melville as his nom de guerre in the French Resistance, and in 1947 he made an independent film based on one of the most famous wartime novels, "The Silence of the Sea." After seeing it, Cocteau entrusted his most famous novel to Melville; with the resulting film, **"Les Enfants Terribles"** (Criterion), Melville broke into the business. But Melville, among the least frivolous of filmmakers, had trouble taking seriously the book's perverse sex and power games involving an adolescent brother and sister and their widening circle of victims. An expert in prewar Hollywood's high-classical precision, he filmed these antics as he would one of the tightly plotted crime stories he dreamed of making (and became famous for, with "Bob le Flambeur," in 1955).

The New Wave grew out of conflicting impulses—experimentation, confrontation, self-revelation, and classicism. Isou and Melville, antipodal prophets, pointed in different directions and guided the young enthusiasts of the future New Wave toward the same promised land.

—*Richard Brody*



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immediately after it, all the people who knew anything about Iraq and the Middle East—those who had serious experience in military, intelligence, or reconstruction work—were thrown out and replaced by ignorant ideologues who refused to take advice. The movie may not offer much that's new factually, but it provides what can only be called sensuous rewards—we need to see how badly Baghdad and Falluja have been torn up, and we need to see and hear the losers in the policy wars (including former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Colonel Paul Hughes, and General Jay Garner), who, despite getting things right, now feel guilty that they couldn't do more to prevent the disaster. Written and directed by Charles Ferguson with steady intelligence and cumulative force.—*D.D.* (8/6/07) (Film Forum.)

RUSH HOUR 3

The director Brett Ratner seems like a regular guy, and in this installment of the franchise he holds Jackie Chan's increasingly stiff acrobatics and Chris Tucker's familiar shtick in the mainstream's dead center with a cheerful dose of frat-house jingoism, sexism, and ethnic joshing. The story, such as it is, involves the Chinese triads, and sends the mismatched pair from Los Angeles to Paris, where they meet a suavely contemptuous detective (Roman Polanski), a crudely contemptuous cabdriver (Yvan Attal), and a multilingual chanteuse (Noémie Lenoir). This is filmmaking by the yard, but Ratner perks up near the end and delivers a vertiginous chase through the latticework of the Eiffel Tower. Only the pounding music and sound effects might keep a viewer awake to that point; such formulaic fare cries out for a director with Quentin Tarantino's studious flair.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

THE SIMPSONS MOVIE

The incomparable gang at full length for the first time, with enough jokes, satire, nonsense, and sentiment to justify the eighty-eight minutes. Homer falls in love with a pig, interrupting the sadomasochistic bond between him and Bart, and pollutes Lake Springfield with pig poop. (The family's home state, in case you were wondering, borders on Maine and Kentucky.) As a result, President Schwarzenegger quarantines the town, prompting the locals to drive the Simpsons to Alaska, where Homer has mystical visions with the help of a befurred Inuit woman. Written by the show's creators, Matt Groening and James L. Brooks, among many others. Directed by David Silverman.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

STARDUST

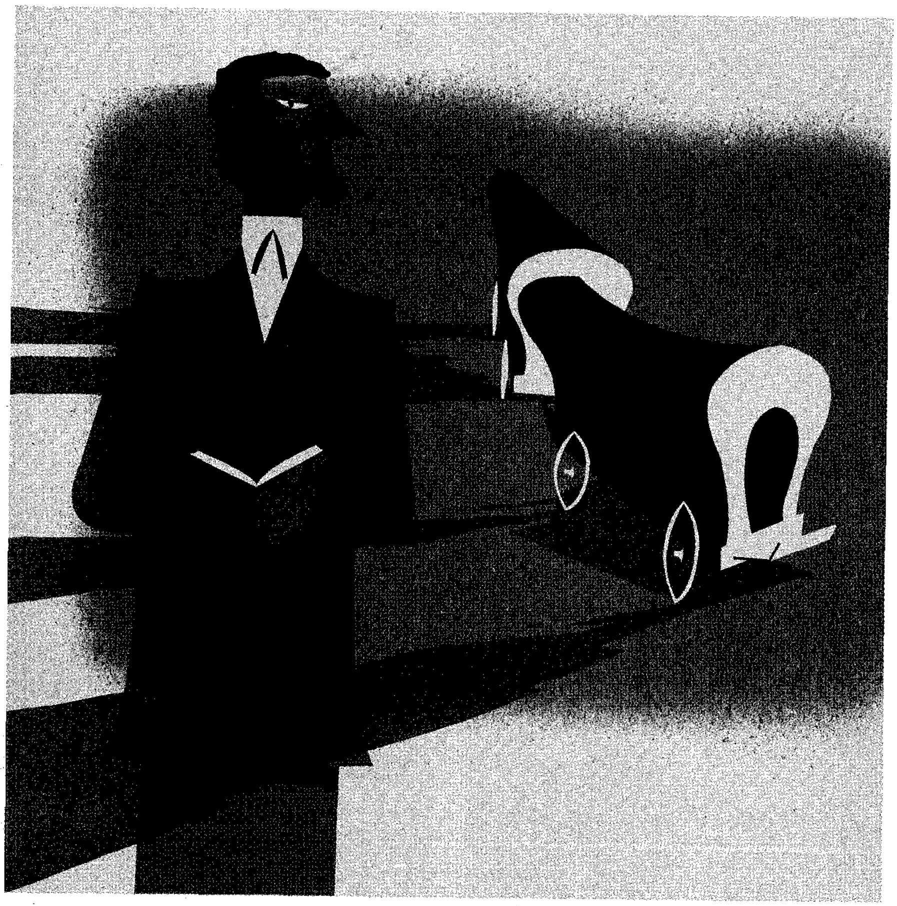
A manic fairy tale, directed by Matthew Vaughn, based on the graphic novel by Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess. The film is a rollicking adventure story that combines romance, over-the-seas swashbuckling, supernatural kingdoms, palace rivalries, and echoes of Shakespeare's “Tempest.” For a good-hearted fantasy, it's more surprising and effective than the usual kiddie-matinée madness. Vaughn's direction is steady, if at times a bit rushed, and the story is convincingly delivered with verve and humor by actors who are clearly out to have a good time. The cast includes Michelle Pfeiffer as the evil witch, Claire Danes as a heavenly star made flesh, Ricky Gervais as a fence, Peter O'Toole as the ailing king, Jason Flemyng and Rupert Everett as Primus and Secundus, the heirs to his throne, and Robert De Niro as the captain of an airborne pirate ship who dances the cancan.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

SUPERBAD

A suburban mock epic, first conceived by the screenwriters Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg when they were teen-agers, and much revised, under the eye of the producer Judd Apatow. The comedy is now ripely Apatovian—a mixture of desperately filthy talk and the most tender, even delicate, emotion. Three primal high-school nerds (the plump, hysterical Jonah Hill, the sweet-faced Michael Cera, and the pale, needle-nosed Christopher Mintz-Plasse) agree to buy the booze for a senior-class party being thrown by the coolest girls. The boys reason that the girls will get so drunk they will make out with them by mistake. Getting themselves to the party, however, turns out to be a journey somewhat more difficult than that endured by the Greeks coming home from Troy, and the friendship of Hill and Cera, who are inseparable, almost breaks up from the strain of it. The director, Greg Mottola, indulges some TV-grade slapstick involving two antic cops (Rogen and Bill Hader), but many of his touches are miraculously right, and there's an amazing sequence devoted to one of the boys' memories of drawing penises as a ten-year-old—a child's garden of verses for our time.—*D.D.* (8/20/07) (In wide release.)

2 DAYS IN PARIS

A loving but ill-matched couple, Marion (Julie Delpy, who also wrote and directed the film) and her American boyfriend, Jack (Adam Goldberg), make a brief stop in Marion's home town before returning to New York. Their stay is more than long enough, however, to open up carnal and cultural rifts: Jack is bemused by his girlfriend's mother and father—unkempt anarchists played by Delpy's real-life parents, Marie Pillet and Albert Delpy—and nagged by continual revelations of her past desires. The resulting conflict is largely played for laughs, with nods to Woody Allen, but there is a rude harshness in Delpy's approach, a taste for close confrontation, which both sours and enlivens what might otherwise have drifted into an easygoing comedy of manners. Delpy seems genuinely torn between two worlds, and, where the Allen of “Manhattan” was lost in reverence for his city, the Parisienne delivers little more than a bitter billet-doux. In English and French.—*A.L.* (8/13/07) (In wide release.)



“September Dawn,” a Western directed by Christopher Cain, opens Aug. 24.

PASCAL BLANCHET

Also Playing

DEATH AT A FUNERAL: In wide release. **THE INVASION:** In wide release. **MANDA BALA:** Angelika Film Center. **NO RESERVATIONS:** In limited release. **UNDERDOG:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

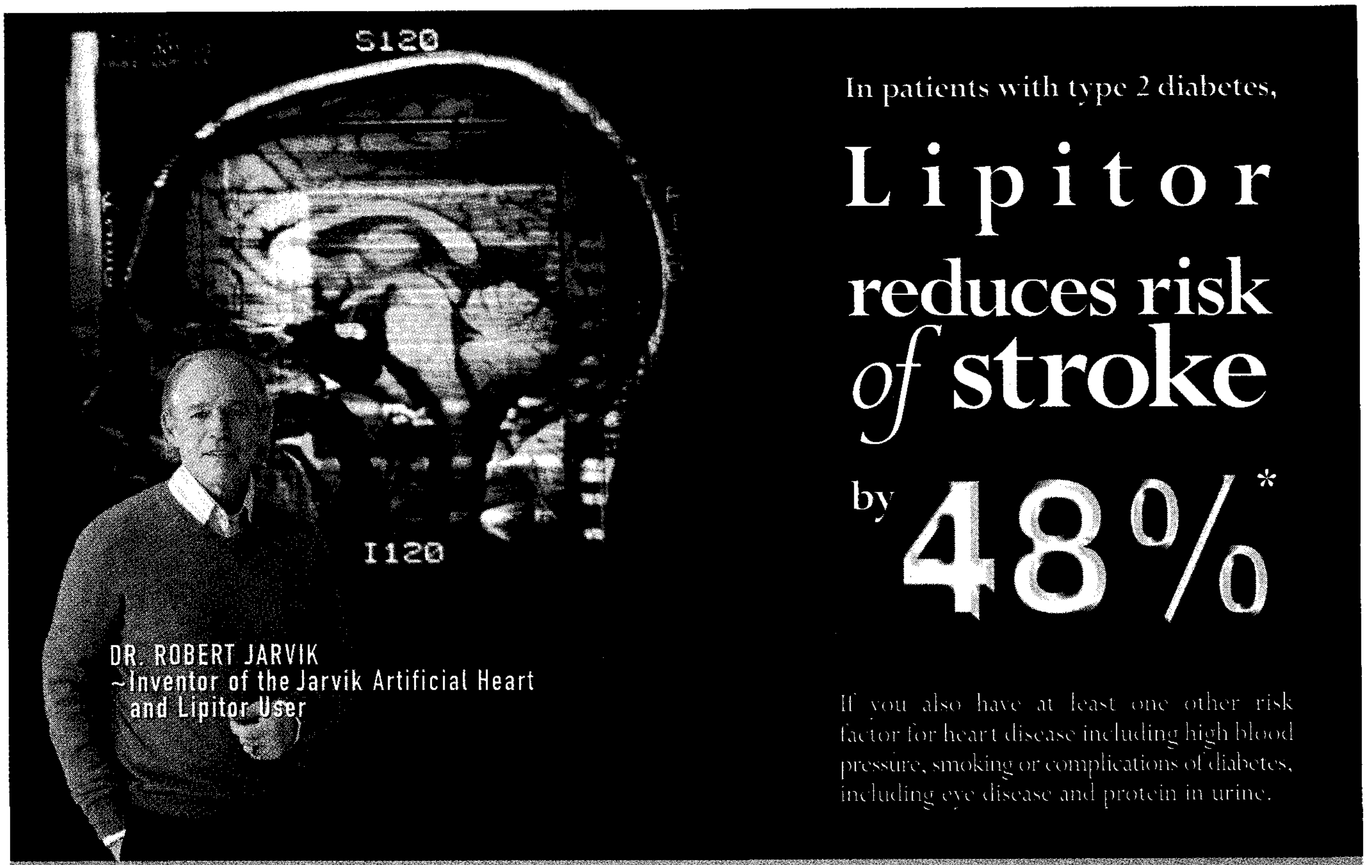
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—“NewFilmmakers Presents.” Aug. 22 at 8: “Here's to Revenge” (2007, Shawn Tracy). ♦ Aug. 22 at 9:30: “Ben's Plan” (2006, Jenna Ricker). ♦ The films of Bill Douglas. Aug. 22-23 at 7, Aug. 24 at 9:30, Aug. 25 at 4:30, and Aug. 26 at 7:30: “My Childhood” (†) and “My Ain Folk” (1973). ♦ Aug. 22-23 at 9, Aug. 25 at 6:45, and Aug. 26 at 9:30: “My Way Home” (1978). ♦ Aug. 24 at 6, Aug. 25 at 8:30, and Aug. 26 at 4: “Comrades” (1986). ♦ Aug. 25 at 3 and Aug. 26 at 2:30: “Bill Douglas: Intent on Getting the Image” (2006, Andy Kimpton-Nye). ♦ Special screenings. Aug. 24 at 7 and 9 and Aug. 25-26 at 5, 7, and 9: “Anger Me” (2006, Elio Gelmini) and “Elliott's Suicide” (2007, Kenneth Anger).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—New York Korean Film Festival. Aug. 22 at 6:30: “Come Come Come Upward” (1989, Im Kwon-taek; in Korean). ♦ Aug. 22 at 9:30: “Festival” (1996, Im; in Korean). ♦ “Hong Kong Film.” Aug. 23 at 7: “Exiled” (2006, Johnnie To; in Cantonese). ♦ Aug. 24 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “House of Fury” (2005, Stephen Fung; in Cantonese and English). ♦ Aug. 25 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “Crazy N' the City” (2005, James Yuen and Lanbo Cheuk; in Cantonese). ♦ Aug. 26 at 3 and 7: “Election” (2005, To; in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English) and “Triad Election” (2006, To; in Mandarin and Cantonese). ♦ “Paul Giamatti Selects.” Aug. 27 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “Brewster McCloud” (1970, Robert Altman). ♦ Aug. 28 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: “The Big Clock” (1948, John Farrow).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—“NYC Noir.” Aug. 22-23 at 1, 4:25, and 7:50: “Something Wild” (1961, Jack Garfein). ♦ Aug. 22-23 at 3:05, 6:30, and 9:55: “Killer's Kiss” (1955, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Aug. 24-25 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: “Rope” (1948, Alfred Hitchcock.). ♦ Aug. 24-25 at 2:35, 6:15, and 9:55; Aug. 26 at 1:10, 5:15, and 9:30; and Aug. 27 at 1 and 5:05: “Rear Window” (1954, Hitchcock). ♦ Aug. 26 at 3:15 and 7:30 and Aug. 27 at 3:05: “The Wrong Man” (1957, Hitchcock). ♦ Aug.



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27 at 7:30: Short silent films about New York from the Library of Congress. ♦ Aug. 27 at 8:50: "Lonesome" (1929, Paul Fejos; silent). ♦ Aug. 28 at 2, 5:55, and 9:50: "Born to Win" (1971, Ivan Passer). ♦ Aug. 28 at 3:45 and 7:40: "Klute" (1971, Alan J. Pakula).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"The New Talkies: Generation DIY." ♦ Aug. 22-23 at 12:20 and 9:55: "Funny Ha Ha" (2002, Andrew Bujalski). ♦ Aug. 24 at 12:20 and 9:55: "Kissing on the Mouth" (2005, Joe Swanberg). ♦ Aug. 25 at 12:20 and 9:55: "Young American Bodies," Season 1 (2006, Joe Swanberg), introduced by the director. ♦ Aug. 26-27 at 12:20 and 9:55: "The Puffy Chair" (2006, Jay Duplass). ♦ Aug. 28 at 12:20 and 9:55: "Dance Party, USA" (2006, Aaron Katz). ♦ "Waverly Midnights: Remembering James Lyons." Aug. 24-25: "The Virgin Suicides" (1999, Sofia Coppola).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"The Other Claude Chabrol." Except where noted, all films are in French. Aug. 22 at 6:15 and Aug. 25 at 6:30: "Code Name: Tiger" (1964). ♦ Aug. 22 at 8:15 and Aug. 26 at 3: "An Orchid for the Tiger" (1966). ♦ Aug. 23 at 8: "The Necklace" (2007) and "Unusual Stories: The Earring" (1979). ♦ Aug. 24 at 6:15: "Dr. M" (1990; in English). ♦ Aug. 24 at 8:30: "Unusual Stories: Monsieur Bébé" (1973). ♦ Aug. 25 at 4:30: "Fantômas: L'Échafaud Magique" (1979). ♦ Aug. 26 at 5: "Masks" (1987). ♦ Aug. 27 at 6:30: "Unusual Stories: Invitation to the Hunt" (1974). ♦ Aug. 27 at 8: "The Color of Lies" (1988). ♦ Special screening. Aug. 23 at 6:15: "Kamp Katrina" (2007, David Redmon and Ashley Sabin), introduced by the directors. ♦ "Automatic Update." Aug. 25 at 2: "Pi" (1998, Darren Aronofsky).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Sept. 2: "Uneasy Riders: American Film in the Nixon Years, 1970-1974." Aug. 25 at 3: "The Crazies" (1973, George A. Romero). ♦ Aug. 25 at 5:30: "Straw Dogs" (1971, Sam Peckinpah). ♦ Aug. 26 at 3: "Bone" (1972, Larry Cohen), introduced by the director. ♦ Aug. 26 at 6: "The Spook Who Sat by the Door" (1973, Ivan Dixon).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Aug. 24 and Aug. 27-29 at 9 and Aug. 25-26 at 5 and 9: "Kamp Katrina" (2007, David Redmon and Ashley Sabin).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Aug. 24 at 9:30: "Michael" (1924, Carl Theodor Dreyer; silent).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Garbo & Dietrich: Screen Goddesses." Aug. 25 at 6: "The Devil Is a Woman" (†). ♦ Aug. 25 at 7:30: "Conquest" (1937, Clarence Brown).

READINGS AND TALKS

BRYANT PARK
The "Word for Word" series presents a panel discussion of women's fiction, with Jennifer Belle, Caprice Crane, Megan Crane, and Carrie Karasyov. Ned Vizzini is the host. (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-768-4242. Aug. 22 at 12:30.)

HOUSING WORKS BOOKSTORE CAFÉ
Phil Freeman, the editor of the essay collection "Marooned: The Next Generation of Desert Island Discs," joins the music writers Scott Seward, Kandia Crazy Horse, Daphne Carr, and Tom Breihan (all of whom contributed to the book) to talk about what one record they can't live without. (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. Aug. 22 at 7.)

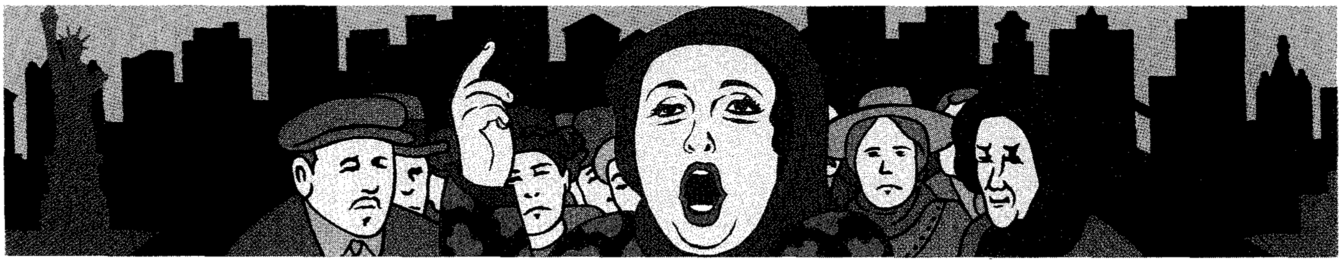
WESLEY STACE
Stace, an Englishman who is also the singer-songwriter known as John Wesley Harding, discusses his new novel, "By George." (Barnes & Noble, 4 Astor Pl. No tickets necessary. Aug. 23 at 7.)

MARY GORDON
The novelist reads from her memoir "Circling My Mother." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 66th St. No tickets necessary. Aug. 27 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

HOT SPIKES
The second annual Brooklyn Open brings professional volleyball players from around the country to Coney Island. (For more information, visit www.brooklynavp.com. Aug. 23-26.)

HOT CARS
The Rumblers Car Club, a close-knit group of automobile enthusiasts founded by, among others, Roger Miret, a singer for the local hardcore punk band Agnostic Front, throws its biggest party of the year. Its "Kustom Kills and Hot Rod Thrills" draws some three hundred pre-1964 lead sleds, beaters, and other cars to a parking lot in Williamsburg beneath the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. And in case the gleaming sheet metal and the smell of exhaust aren't enough of a lure, rockabilly bands are also scheduled to perform that afternoon at Union Pool, a nearby bar. (For more information, visit www.rumblersnyc.com. Aug. 25, starting at 10 A.M.)



MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

Stephanie Blythe, who will sing at the Rose Theatre.

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
SOUTHBOUND
Sept. 7-18

Walter Reade reopens after Labor Day with its annual "Latinbeat" series, highlighting films from and about Latin America. The offerings in this year's series are particularly rich; they include Paz Encina's innovative and politically trenchant "Paraguayan Hammock," Carlos Reygadas's intense and contemplative first feature, "Japón," and a reprise of Alejandro González Iñárritu's "Amores Perros." (212-875-5600.)

DANCE
MODERN MOVEMENT
Sept. 11-23

The eighty-year-old Martha Graham Dance Company returns to the Joyce. Expect the usual masterworks, plus variations on Graham's "Lamentation" sketched by Aszure Barton, Larry Keigwin, and Richard Move. (212-242-0800.)

NIGHT LIFE
RAISING A SMILE
Sept. 15

Five ace session musicians make up the local Beatles cover act the Fab Faux. They will re-create "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" at the Beacon Theatre; the show includes an interview with Geoff Emerick, the original album's sound engineer. (212-465-6500.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SONGS OF TRAVEL
Sept. 19

With Alice Tully Hall undergoing renovations, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center is ranging into new venues and new music. "American Explorations," at the Rose Theatre, features Alan Louis Smith's song cycle "Vignettes: Ellis Island" (performed by the mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe) in addition to pieces by Stravinsky, Dvořák, and Ives. (212-875-5788.)

ART
ALL SAINTS
Sept. 20-April 6, 2008

The Belgian artist Francis Alÿs, who lives in Mexico City, has spent two decades scouring flea markets and antique shops for images of St. Fabiola. Almost three hundred portraits of the Roman saint will line the Hispanic Society's galleries. (212-926-2234.)

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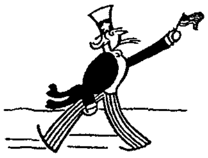
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
ROVIAN WAYS



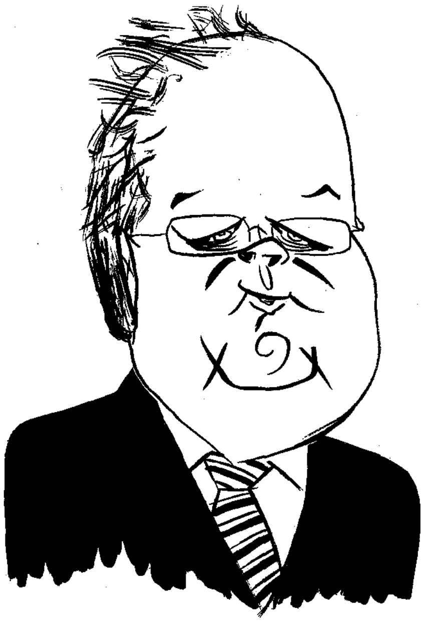
Most politicians find the cult of the political consultant annoying, but George W. Bush always seemed to find it very annoying. When he began running for President, he insisted, as candidates rarely do, that all his top advisers work only for him. So Karl Rove sold the business he had spent his adult life building up, went to work for Bush as an employee, and remained one until he announced, last week, that he would be leaving the White House.

This arrangement says a lot about both Bush and Rove. For someone like Bush, with a strong need to feel in control, to tolerate a mere staff aide's becoming as big a celebrity as Rove shows how deeply he must appreciate Rove's contribution to getting him elected to office—to the point, perhaps, of doubting that he could win without him. For Rove's part, the arrangement demonstrates that power and a place in history mattered more to him than money, and that he was a true believer in his boss in a way that most consultants are not. It's hard not to think that if Bush had insisted that Rove stay on until the end of his Presidency he would have complied; the President, with no more campaigns left to win, must have come to see that the costs of Rove—who, lately, has been in the news more in connection with political investigations than with political victories—were outweighing the benefits.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Before Rove joined Bush full time, he had maneuvered himself into a position in Texas that was about as close as it is possible to get to being an old-fashioned political boss. The state, thanks in part to his efforts, was solidly Republican, and candidates at every level of elective office—the governorship, the congressional delegation, the state Supreme Court, the legislature—begged him to consent to be hired by them. If he agreed, he would run a typically ruthless and hyper-organized campaign, and usually win.

In Washington, Rove's style didn't play as well. While he was winning electoral battles—in 2000, 2002, and 2004—he was accumulating enemies. He insulted members of Congress, terrified people who worked for him, and forcefully entered the airspace of executive-branch officials who were used to being left alone by the White House political operation. (If Congress ever succeeds in getting Rove to testify, we may learn that the United States Attorneys were among them.) But it was Rove's failures to deliver legislative victories on major Bush initiatives like Social Security and immigration and to keep the House and the Senate Republican in 2006 that made him just famous and controversial, rather than that plus unstoppable.



It would be a mistake to think of Rove as an entity separate from Bush. The President has behaved with the same overreaching swagger in realms that weren't Rove's as he has in realms that were. It was surely Bush's decision, after the 2004 election, to spend political capital by launching the grand, doomed attempt to privatize the Social Security program. That plan generally gets credited to Rove, as the war in Iraq gets credited to Dick Cheney, but they are Bush's failures, and not just by virtue of his having stood idly by while his aides manipulated him. The similarity of his mistakes demonstrates that he really is the decider.

In a city run by people who have spent their lives endlessly reënacting their election as class president, Rove was un-dull: he was the fabulist, boundary violator, autodidact, mean boy, schemer. It wasn't always easy to tell when he was kidding, or being disingenuous. An example is his professed admiration for William McKinley, one of the country's least memorable Presidents. Is it just a thinly disguised way for Rove to compare himself to Mark Hanna, McKinley's Rove and arguably a more important historical figure? Or is it a sign of Rove's preoccupation with Republican majority-building above all? Or is it just perversity for the fun of it?

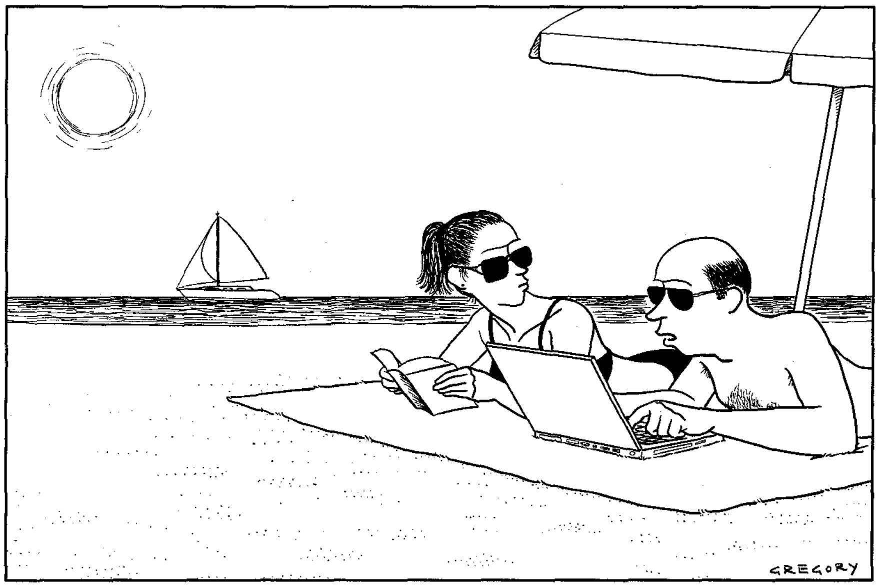
Whatever Rove really thinks about McKinley, it's fair to say that his vision of the good in politics (and maybe Bush's, too) is rooted in the late nineteenth century, when parties and bosses were at their most powerful, when the federal government was run on patronage, and when the distinction between "politics" and "policy," and the idea that "partisanship" is bad, hadn't occurred to anyone but a few patrician reformers. If Ronald Reagan was trying to abolish Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, Rove and Bush were trying to abolish the Progressive Era, which, in their view, had given liberal "élites"—judges, journalists, policy analysts, bureaucrats—an electorally unearned thumb on the scales of government.

Rove never pushed for a policy unless he saw a group of big funders or a significant electoral constituency which it might bring to the Republican Party. Social Security privatization was supposed to attract middle-class people whose pensions had been invested in the stock market; immigration reform to attract Latinos and small-business owners; the No Child Left Behind law public-school parents; and so on. Conversely, Rove was always looking for neglected constituencies—the most important by far being frequent churchgoers—and trying to figure out what mix of government goodies and organizing techniques would bring them into the Republican fold. (He was never a real conservative, except in the liberal-hating sense, because the idea that everybody who participates in politics expects something from government was at the heart of his thinking.)

That's why for Rove's opponents to renounce all things Rovian would be to miss an opportunity. He was consistently better than the other side at reaching the groups that felt shut out of politics, usually through local organizing. There are plenty of these groups on the left as well as on the right, but Democrats have let the muscles needed to reach them grow slack. Organizing is hard, unglamorous work; the language it requires is combative, self-interested, and non-seigneurial. It's no accident that the fortunes of Hillary Clinton, which Rove spent a good part of last week running down, have risen, and the excitement she generates among liberal élites has fallen, as she has become less focussed on a rhetoric of "vision" and more adept at dealing with interest groups, from dairy farmers to preschool parents and wounded veterans.

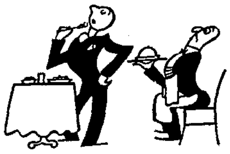
Also, the kind of interest-group politics that Rove practiced creates a culture of compromise in Washington that, though unlovely to behold, serves as a brake on power. As James Madison, the namesake of Rove's only child, put it, "The society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens, that the rights of individuals, or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority." Rove's paradox is that he combined a modestly Madisonian view of political motivation with an overwhelming drive to power. The ego said one thing, the id said another, and the id always won. Trying to be the most aggressive strategist, with the most influence over politics and policy, in the most historically significant modern Administration, finally landed him on the sidelines, the place he least wanted to be.

—*Nicholas Lemann*



"I am not a workaholic. I just work to relax."

ROYALS
POSH SPICES



The importance of eating seasonally and locally has become a guiding principle among the increasing number of Britons who take seriously the environmental impact and gustatory quality of their mealtimes; and it is reassuring to know that the principle is observed at the highest social levels. Consider the weekend house party held recently at Birkhall, the Prince of Wales's house on the Queen's Balmoral estate, before the sixtieth birthday of Camilla Parker Bowles, the Duchess of Cornwall. "It was all local—one day we had Aberdeen Angus beef from around the corner, and crab from Aberdeen; and the next day there were langoustines, and stuff from the garden," Camilla's son, Tom, said, a few days after returning from Scotland.

Since 2001, Tom Parker Bowles has been the food writer at *Tatler*, the British society magazine. He is also the author of a new book, "The Year of Eating Dangerously," in which he chronicles his global culinary adventures: fugu in Japan, ultra-hot sauces in New Mexico, ant-egg salad in Laos, dog soup in South Korea. "The thing about food writing is that there are only about fifteen adjectives you can use—'delicious,' 'delectable,' 'unctuous'—so that is why I moved to the disgusting side," Parker Bowles explained over lunch recently.

He had chosen to eat at Scott's, a new

restaurant in Mayfair that serves, among other traditional British dishes, a variation of stargazy pie, a Cornish delicacy in which the cooked heads of pilchards poke through the piecrust. British food is, in Parker Bowles's view, wrongly maligned. "Potted shrimp, clotted cream, our scones and our baking—we have one of the richest food heritages in the world," he said, through mouthfuls of smoked sardines with soft-boiled duck's egg.

Parker Bowles, who is thirty-three, was tapped for *Tatler* after graduating from Oxford and setting up a concierge service called Quintessentially, which provided anything from opera tickets to restaurant reservations for its wellborn members. He is married to Sara Buys, a fashion-features editor at *Harper's Bazaar*, who is expecting their first child. The couple live in Notting Hill. "It's such a cliché, and everyone's a twat, but I love it," he said. "Mine's not the posh part but the back part, the All Saints Road. When you were young, you could buy anything you wanted there, and when you were sixteen that was very attractive, but you always got ripped off: a little white boy, very posh."

Parker Bowles is tall and fair, like his mother, though he also resembles his father, Andrew, the Queen's former Silver Stick-in-Waiting. (Parker Bowles admitted that he isn't sure exactly what a Silver Stick-in-Waiting does, but said it has something to do with assisting the Gold Stick-in-Waiting.) When his mother's relationship with the Prince was exposed, Parker Bowles insisted, he remained relatively unscathed. "It didn't take too much of a brain to work out what was going on," he said. "My parents loved each other, but their marriage was not perhaps as many other people describe marriage."

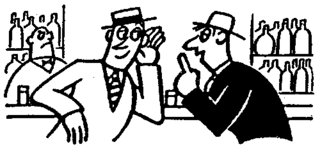
Parker Bowles calls his stepfather Sir, and says that he greets him with a small bow. "It is what everyone called him when we were growing up," he said. "We always assumed from the way people spoke that his name was Sir." (Prince Charles is also Parker Bowles's godfather.) The Prince of Wales "always was, and still is, a kind, good, and fascinating man," Parker Bowles said. "He was way ahead of his time with organic farming and sustainable food, and he was called wacky."

Camilla's second wedding, celebrated at Windsor Castle, was surreal, Parker Bowles said. "There was one moment when we were all coming out of the church. The Royal Family obviously went first, and there were these great big wooden doors for keeping out the barbarian hordes. My sister and I were directly behind, and these doors were suddenly slammed in our faces. They didn't recognize us—they just thought we were dodgy guests." Parker Bowles speaks of his stepgrandmother with awe: "She is more than just a woman. She is on the stamps, and on the notes, and here you are, sneaking a glance at her. You meet a lot of people who are famous and after a bit you realize that they are just like everyone else, but the Queen is different."

Parker Bowles sees less of his mother now that she is a member of the Royal Family. Debate continues on what Camilla's title might be when Charles becomes King, but Parker Bowles says that his own status as a commoner, albeit a well-connected one, remains unchanged. "My mother has married Sir, and my sister and I have nothing to do with it," he said. "In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there were always scheming stepmothers and evil princes, but my mother's not that type."

—Rebecca Mead

PIGGYBANK DEPT.
DRIVING DRUNKS



At twenty-five minutes after ten on a recent Thursday night, a man came bounding off the SeaStreak ferry in Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey. It had been an hour since he boarded the boat, at Pier 11 on Wall Street, and, judging from his erratic stride, perhaps a few more since he stopped working and started tippling. The man raised a set of keys in the air and shouted, "Wingman!" Vince Falcetano, a junior at the University of Scranton, and a founder of the Wingmen Driving Service, stepped forward to offer his hand. "I'm just going to use the toilet," the man said. "I'll see you by my car. I'm in a two-seater tonight."

You can learn a lot about the social dynamics of a community from driving its drunks home in their own automobiles. Falcetano said that "cops just hate the SeaStreak guys," many of whom are bankers with sweet rides. (The man's was a Thunderbird convertible.) The Wingmen, in addition to Falcetano, include Norm Dannen (Fordham), Colin Keany (Brookdale Community College), and Zach McCue (Penn State), who all grew up on the same block in nearby Rumson. Only Dannen can drive stick, but they otherwise take turns playing chauffeur while the others follow in another car. The usual charge is twenty dollars, and the tips are often generous, even if Dannen was once made to perform a robot dance before collecting his.

The trailing car this time was a '91 Dodge Caravan—"Mom's car," Dannen said. While Falcetano endured a lecture from his customer about American hegemony ("The dollar fucking runs the world"), his friends recalled memorable clientele, such as the group of young mothers who requested a 3 A.M. pit stop at a greasy spoon and boasted of their various liaisons over cheese fries. Keany had recently driven a semi-comatose woman who asked, "Can I get out of the car?" (They were moving at the time.) His only directions had been to "make a left at the giant wooden tooth," which baffled him until he saw a dentist's office nearby. Her fiancé met them at the curb and slung her over his shoulder.

Around midnight, the Wingmen pulled up at another ferry landing, and Dannen stepped out to relieve himself behind a jetty. When he returned, a flashlight beam was shining on the dash. "Did you just take a piss?" a police officer asked. He issued the Wingmen a citation—a substantial blow to the evening's profits, which, on a weeknight, rarely exceed two hundred dollars. This prompted McCue to recount the unfortunate experience he had with the owner of a pickup truck, who tried urinating in an empty Coors Light bottle and ended up spritzing the steering wheel.

Between jobs, the Wingmen stopped for burgers at the Wendy's drive-through and pointed out the local sights: Bruce's house ("We played summer hoops with his kids"), Bon Jovi's house ("You see him at the fair a lot"), Geraldo's old house. At 1 A.M., they got a call from a bartender in Sea Bright, who had evidently been sampling the merchandise, and after that they were summoned to the Celtic Cottage in Long Branch. Journey was playing on the jukebox while, outside, a couple embraced in an alley: a kind of Jersey Shore idyll.

"Vince!" a young man yelled as Falcetano crossed the street. This was Pat, a repeat caller. Pat introduced Falcetano to Mike, the man with the keys. "You do anything to this car, my dad will fuck you up," Mike said as he and Pat and two blond women climbed into a Lexus with South Carolina plates. The car pulled out. Mike turned to face the back seat. "Patty, you got beers at your house?" he asked. But Pat was momentarily preoccupied with the young woman who was straddling his lap. A few minutes later, after the drop-off, Springsteen's "Hungry Heart" came on the radio, and the Wingmen, together again in Dannen's mom's Caravan, began to sing.

—Ben McGrath

WO-O-O DEPT.
SKUNKED

There might be an appliance theme to the haunting of the Merchant's House, a nineteenth-century town house in the East Village that was owned by a single family until 1933, when it was turned into a museum. In the nineteen-seventies, someone decided to fit the kitchen with a cast-iron stove. One day, the story goes, a museum worker witnessed the stove shaking violently, as if someone were pushing it from behind. In the early nineties, the museum's curator installed a computer. The machine froze every time she typed "Tredwell"—the last name of the house's original owner. "Well, not every time, but three out of five," Pi Gardiner, the museum's current executive director, explained one night recently. "Our theory was that the spirits were, like, 'What is all this new-fangled technology?' "

Gardiner was discussing these and other bizarre happenings with Dan Sturges, a paranormal investigator who has been brought in to case the house. (The staff is compiling a book called "Some Say They Never Left: Tales of the Strange and Inexplicable at the Merchant's House Museum." Sample entry: "Coming from the Bedroom Floor below, I heard what sounded like running and stamping by small children.") Sturges, who is bald, tattooed, and beefy—more Stay Puft Marshmallow Man than Ghostbuster—agreed that the technology theory was plausible. "It could be that the spirits in the house are frustrated," he said. "All the psychokinetic or telekinetic energy and the anger—that can really screw up computers."

Seabury Tredwell, the patriarch of the presumed ghost family, bought the house for his wife and their seven children in 1835. When he died, his kids stuck around—most notably Gertrude, the youngest, who stayed until her death, at the age of ninety-three. Sturges, a veteran of more than fifty missions with Paranormal Investigation of NYC, is searching for their spirits pro bono. (He did the same for the Belasco Theatre and for the restaurant One If by Land, Two If by Sea. He supplements his income with acting gigs; see the 2002 Hungry Man "XXL" commercial.)

Sturges unpacked his equipment: a digital-video recorder, two electromagnetic-field meters, a thermocouple—like an iPod, with a metal coil to tell temperature (you look for cold spots)—a digital camera, and a tape recorder. "My dad was a fisherman," he said. "I tell people I go out fishing. You don't always catch something. Plenty of times, you get skunked."

In the parlor—heavy red curtains, a portrait of a dour-looking Seabury Tredwell—Sturges checked the temperature: eighty-one degrees. He ran an E.M.F. device over a piano, which Gertrude is said to play in the early evenings, and spoke into the tape recorder: "This is Dan in the parlor. E.M.F. is constant." He snapped a few pictures of a long, narrow mirror—perfect for apparitions—then went out to the hallway. "When I first started doing this, I didn't tell a lot of my friends," he said. "Because I knew I would get goofed on endlessly. The guys at the gym didn't know about it until they saw something on the news. They were, like, 'Dude, is that you?' "

In Mrs. Tredwell's bedroom, there was a white marble fireplace (the scene of more rumored sightings) and a sign in curvy Victorian script: "The Lord Is My Shepherd/I Shall Not Want." Sturges photographed both items. In the kitchen, which was dank and filled with shadows, he found the haunted stove. Using the tape recorder, he conducted an Electronic Voice Phenomena test. "Is there anybody in the kitchen tonight?" he asked. ("Ideally, we would hear, 'Yes! It's Gertrude!' " he explained.) No reply. In the family room, he inspected two mannequins—one bald, both in yellowed nineteenth-century dresses. He held up the recorder again: "If there's anybody here in this room, can you make a noise? . . . Can you shake the chandelier? A knock on the wall or the ceiling would be great." There was a sort of shuffle outside, on East Fourth Street, but Sturges dismissed it.

In 1997, with the help of a grant from Brooke Astor, who died last week, ownership of the house passed to the City of New York, and it is now overseen by the Parks Department. The other day, Adrian Benepe, the parks commissioner, said that he is open to the possibility that the house is haunted. While visiting last year, he noticed a worn white hairbrush in a display case. "In the old days, people brushed their hair obsessively," he said. "If you run a hairbrush through someone's hair for dozens of years, isn't there some sort of resonant static electricity that stays there forever?"

—Lizzie Widdicombe

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
BEWARE BAILOUTS

In August of 1998, disaster loomed for the U.S. economy. Panic among investors after Russia defaulted on its sovereign bonds led to plummeting stock prices and a freeze on global credit markets. The hedge fund Long-Term Capital Management saw its multibillion-dollar portfolio evaporate in days, and investors pulled their money from any asset that had even a tinge of risk. But then the Federal Reserve came to the rescue, slashing interest rates three times in the space of a few weeks and pouring huge amounts of cash into the financial system. The stock market rebounded, and the economy boomed. Early the next year, *Time* put the Fed chairman, Alan Greenspan, on its cover, along with the Treasury officers Robert Rubin and Larry Summers, with the headline "The Committee to Save the World."

Nine years later, it's been another terrible August on Wall Street. The meltdown of the market in subprime loans, which over the past six months has led to the shuttering of many home lenders and mortgage brokers, has spilled over into the broader credit market. Bankers and bondholders are demanding very high interest rates for risky loans and, in some cases, refusing to lend money at all. Hedge funds and brokerages that invested in subprime securities have found themselves stuck with billions in assets that no one wants to buy, while, in the past month, panicked investors have sent the stock market down almost ten per cent. As anxiety over a global credit crunch spread, Wall Street implored an apparently reluctant Fed to rescue investors once again. And, last Friday, that's exactly what it did, cutting the discount rate—the rate at which it lends to banks—by half a point. In response, investors sent the stock market soaring.

For anyone with a 401(k), it was hard not to greet the Fed's move with relief. But the short-term relief comes with a long-term cost. Money managers created the current turmoil by failing to take risk seriously, enabling borrowers with sketchy credit records to borrow money nearly as cheaply as blue-chip companies. In the past weeks, managers had been paying for their folly. The Fed's decision to flood the system with cheap money will create a textbook case of what's usually called moral hazard: insulating fund managers from the consequences of their errors will encourage similarly risky bets in the future.

Now, you can take a fear of moral hazard, and a desire to see foolishness punished, too far. In times of real crisis, we don't want the Fed to follow the advice that Herbert Hoover said he got from Andrew Mellon during the Great Depression: "Liquidate labor, liquidate stocks, liquidate the farmers, liquidate real estate. . . . Purge the rottenness out of the system." When the health of the U.S. economy is under serious threat, the Fed should act. But in this case it's far from clear that the turmoil was an actual menace to the underlying economy of the U.S. Bailing out hedge-fund managers was great for Wall Street, but it may not have been such a good deal for Main Street.

Wall Street so dominates our image of the U.S. economy these days that it's easy to assume that what's bad for the Street must be bad for everyone else. But, while it's true that a complete market meltdown would have disastrous effects on the economy as a whole, market downturns like those of the past few weeks often have only a small effect on businesses and consumers. In part, that's because much of what happens on Wall Street consists of the shuffling of assets among various well-heeled players, rather than anything that's fundamental to the smooth functioning of the U.S. economy. (The economy did fine before the advent of hedge funds and private-equity funds, and would probably do fine in their absence.) Similarly, while stock-market tumbles are always painful, they have no concrete impact on most American consumers, who own little or no stock. (In any case, the S. & P. 500 is still up ten per cent over the past year, which hardly suggests imminent disaster.) And, in the short run, they're irrelevant to most corporations, too, since few companies actually use the stock market to raise capital.

The bond and loan markets do, of course, matter quite a bit to companies and to individuals, because no economy can run without a steady supply of credit. But, although standards for corporate lending have tightened in recent weeks, and interest rates on corporate bonds may have risen steadily, they're still low by historical standards, while the rates for most traditional mortgages have barely risen. That may be why the economy as a whole shows few signs of imminent doom. Corporate profits continue to go up. Unemployment is still relatively low, and wages in the last quarter rose at a surprisingly fast rate. Likewise, in July, retail sales were healthier than expected, and industrial production was reasonably brisk.

That's not to say that the economy has suffered no fallout from the subprime collapse. The fall in housing prices, the drying up of new construction, and the sharp rise in foreclosures in many areas are having a serious impact on employment and economic growth. But these are not problems that the Fed's action will solve. Cutting the discount rate is not going to help subprime borrowers get new loans, nor will it get the housing market moving again. What it will do is reassure investors and save some money managers from well-deserved oblivion. It may be that the risk of a full-fledged credit crunch was high enough to make this worth doing. But there is something unseemly about watching the avatars of free-market capitalism rely on the government to pay for their bad bets. And there is something scary about contemplating the even bigger bets they'll make in the future if they know that the Fed is there to bail them out.

—*James Surowiecki*

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

APPALACHIAN AUTUMN

Aaron Copland confronts the politics of the Cold War.

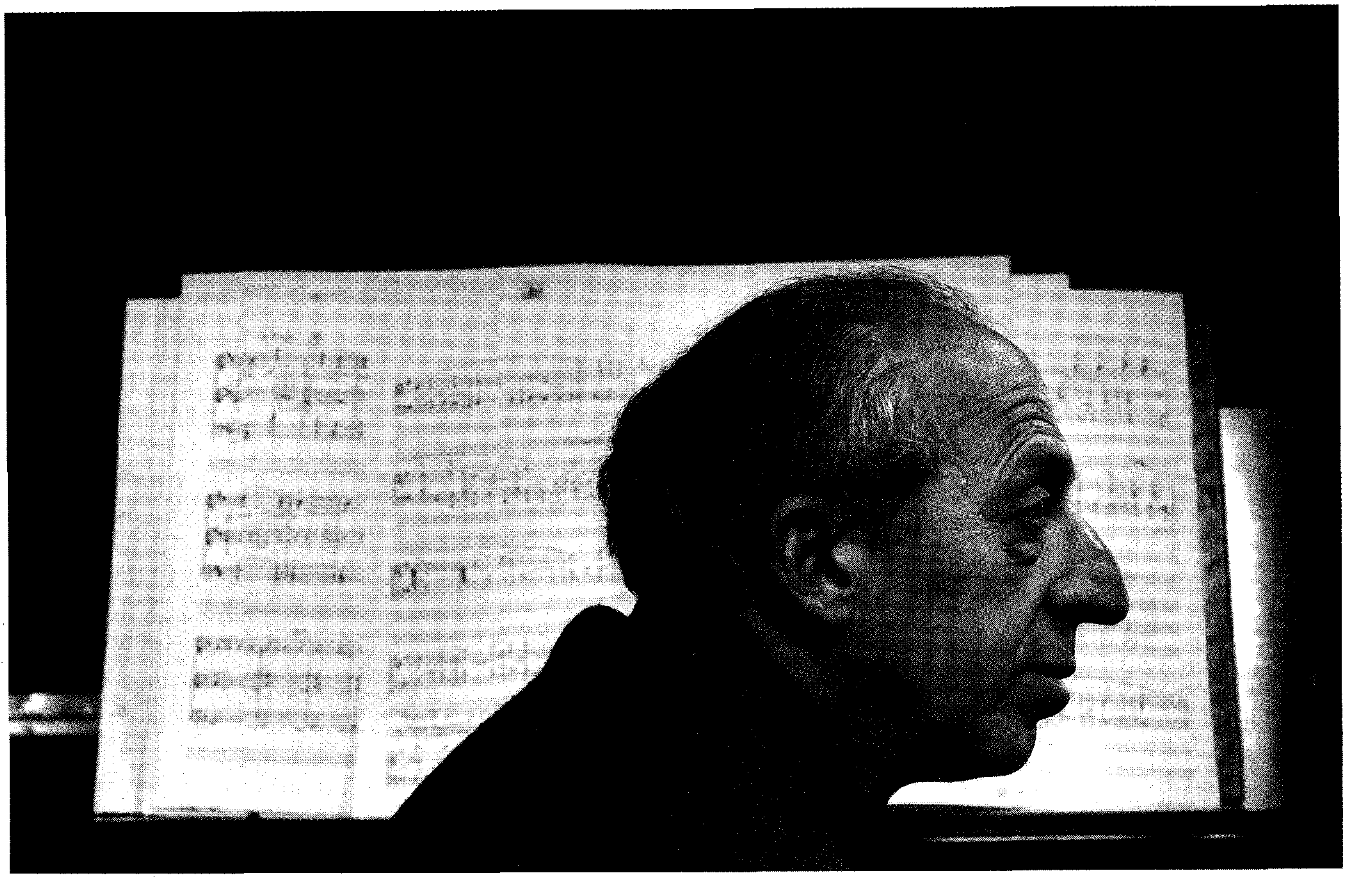
BY ALEX ROSS

On May 8, 1945, the streets of American cities filled with throngs celebrating the Allied victory over fascism in Europe. That week, Aaron Copland, a forty-four-year-old Brooklyn-born composer of Russian-Jewish descent, received a Pulitzer Prize for his ballet score "Appalachian Spring." It was a symbolic ceremony of arrival for an artist who had long labored to bring American composition out of obscurity and into the cultural mainstream. In Copland's youth, most American concert halls and opera houses were essentially shrines to Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner; few native-born talents could win admittance without imitating the European masters. By the time Copland reached the peak of his career, in the late thirties and the early forties, he and other members of his generation, among them Samuel Barber, Roy Harris, and Virgil Thomson, had gained a foothold. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt died, three weeks before V-E Day, the luxurious lamentation of Barber's "Adagio for Strings" unfurled on the radio.

Copland seized the nation's attention by forging a universally recognizable national sound. Works such as "Billy the Kid," "Rodeo," "Lincoln Portrait," "Fanfare for the Common Man," and "Appalachian Spring" became synonymous with the "open prairie," as Copland titled the opening section of "Billy the Kid"; the texture and soul of the heartland seemed implicit in their sparse, open-ended contours, their lonely but happy melodies, their tangy tonal harmonies, their climactic tableaux of sounding brass and drums. At the same time, the music matched the collectivist ethos of the New Deal and Second World War period—the spirit of "common discipline," as Roosevelt put it in his first inaugural address. Beneath the patriotic surface, these scores bore traces of the international leftist politics that preoccupied so many artists and intellectuals in the Roosevelt era. "Billy the Kid" evokes a frontier Eden threatened with urbanization and industrialization. "Lincoln Portrait" arranges quotations from Lincoln into a vaguely socialistic narrative ("As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master"). "Fanfare for the Common Man" takes its title from a speech that Vice-President Henry Wallace delivered in 1942, in which that most militantly leftist of New Dealers thundered, "The people's revolution is on the march, and the devil and all his angels cannot prevail against it."

The political subtext of Copland's music from the thirties and forties is often overlooked today. Countless films, television commercials, news broadcasts, and campaign ads have employed Coplandesque open-interval melodies to suggest the innate goodness of small-town and rural life—elderly couples sitting on porches, newsboys on bicycles, farmers leaning on fences. A diluted version of the "open prairie" manner was heard in Ronald Reagan's "Morning in America" campaign ads. The peroration of "Appalachian Spring," with its grand and gritty harmonization of the Shaker tune "Simple Gifts," has evolved into something like national theme music—the leitmotif of feel-good news.

At the height of the Cold War, however, political watchdogs did not fail to notice Copland's leftward leanings. Investigators in Congress and at the Federal Bureau of Investigation catalogued his multifarious links to progressive, radical, and fellow-traveller groups, notably the semi-Communist cadre of the Group Theatre. Between 1949 and 1953, Copland endured a gruelling test: media vilification after his appearance at the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace, in New York; denunciations from anti-Communists in Congress; and a chilling session before Senator Joseph McCarthy's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Copland emerged from the ordeal apparently unscathed, and retained his iconic status. Yet he was never quite the same afterward. Coincidentally or not, “Appalachian Spring” turned out to be the last triumph of his all-American, music-for-the-masses period, the words of the Shaker hymn spelling out its elusive dream: “When true simplicity is gained / To bow and to bend we shan’t be ashamed.”



Copland, in his music, sought to create an American socialist realism. Photograph by Arnold Newman.

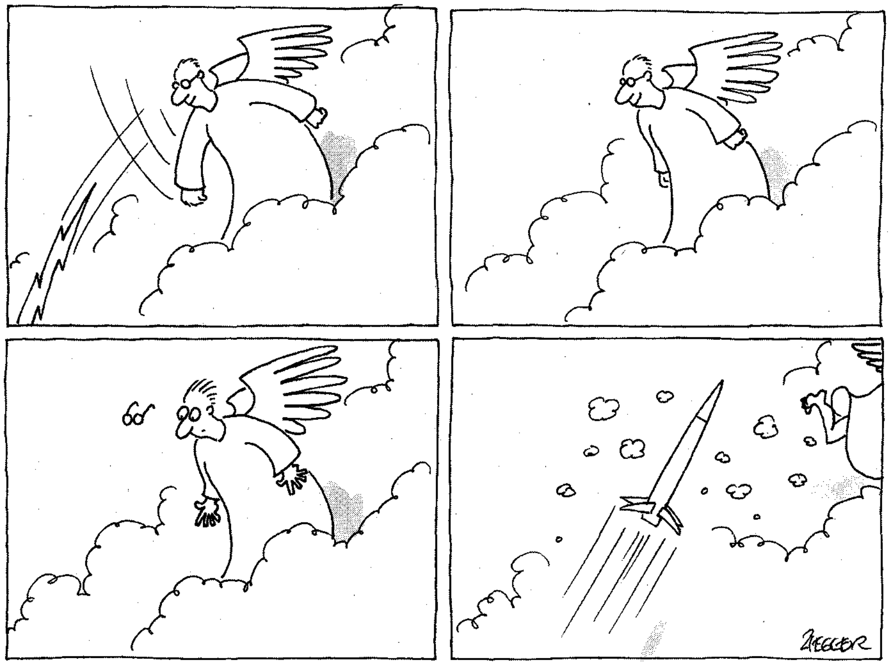
GETTY IMAGES

As the war ended, prospects seemed bright for the populist style that Copland had helped engineer. In 1946, Thomson, who doubled as the most acerbically perceptive critic of the day, crowed in the New York *Herald Tribune*, “We are producing very nearly the best music in the world.” As evidence, he offered a long list of names, including the boy wonder Leonard Bernstein, who had made a sensational conducting début with the New York Philharmonic, in 1943, and had established his compositional credentials with the oracular “Jeremiah” Symphony and the joyously hip musical “On the Town.”

Yet, even as the confetti was being swept from Times Square, V-E exuberance faded into a darker, more volatile state of mind. America was surging toward unprecedented domestic prosperity and global influence, but the mood at home turned cynical and edgy, as the middle class fell prey to the fear that Roosevelt had warned against at his first Inaugural. The fear focussed, above all, on Communism. The detonation of the first Soviet nuclear device in the summer of 1949 and the subsequent unmasking of the physicist Klaus Fuchs as a Soviet spy intensified the anti-Communist hysteria.

New Deal-style populism began to acquire a dubious reputation. Power-to-the-people gestures in the “serious” arts could now be read as evidence of a suspect consciousness. Modernists, on the other hand, garnered admiring adjectives such as “unyielding” and “uncompromising,” their contrary stance imbued with political as well as aesthetic implications. Thus, the critic Clement Greenberg trumpeted Abstract Expressionist painters as icons of a tough postwar spirit. In March, 1948, Greenberg announced in the pages of *Partisan Review* that, with the rise of Pollock and others, “the main premises of Western Art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power.” The mainstream media went along to some extent with this conceit. In August, 1949, *Life* published photographs of Jackson Pollock’s “drip” paintings, and asked in a headline whether Pollock was “the Greatest Living Painter in the United States.” Given that *Life* was under the wing of Henry Luce, the mogul who heralded the “American Century,” Pollock’s abstractions acquired a certain political nobility.

In October, 1946, as the country was tilting to the right, Copland introduced his Third Symphony—his first attempt at a large-scale, four-movement symphony in the vein of Beethoven, Brahms, and, especially, Dmitri Shostakovich. At the height of the Second World War, Shostakovich had attained celebrity in America as a symbol of the common front against Hitler; *Time*, Luce’s other flagship publication, had put the composer on its cover in 1942, at the time of a nationwide broadcast of the Seventh Symphony, the “Leningrad.” The metal-



lic sonorities and obsessively striving melodic ideas of Copland's Third plainly echoed the language of Shostakovich's most recent symphonies, which exemplified, at least on the surface, socialist realism in the musical realm.

The conductor Serge Koussevitzky, who commissioned the work for the Boston Symphony, dubbed it "the greatest American symphony." But skepticism crept into the critical reaction; *Time* quoted a Boston critic calling the work "Shostakovich in the Appalachians." The anonymous *Time* writer went on to say that Copland was now too popular for his own good—"too busy to be a great composer." The implication was that Copland's big-shouldered music was out of step with the temper of the times.

The Third had another, partly hidden political layer. In the finale, Copland quoted his own "Fanfare for the Common Man," that muscular utterance inspired by Wallace's "Century of the Common Man." By the fall of 1946, Wallace was no longer a nationally respected figure. Roosevelt had in fact dropped him from the national ticket in 1944, wary of his undisguised friendliness toward the Soviets. Instead, Wallace became Commerce Secretary. In September, 1946, Truman fired him from that post on account of a string of pro-Soviet remarks. To be associated with an unrepentant New Dealer like Wallace had become a political risk. As the scholar Elizabeth Crist points out in her 2005 book "Music for the Common Man," Virgil Thomson made this subtext explicit in a review of the symphony the following year, in which he mocked its resemblance to "the speeches of Henry Wallace, striking in phraseology but all too reminiscent of Moscow."

Thomson's attack on the Third Symphony was a brilliantly manipulative feat of musical politics, yet Copland himself was playing naïve ideological games. His occasional commentaries on the international situation showed little awareness of what life inside the Soviet Union was really like. In April, 1948, he attempted to analyze recent Soviet denunciations of composers, such as Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev, who had been reprimanded for espousing so-called "formalist" or obscurantist tendencies: "[The composers] were rebuked for failing to realize that their musical audience had expanded enormously in the last several years . . . and that composers can no longer continue to write only for a few initiates." Such remarks brushed dangerously close to the Party line.

In March, 1949, Copland attended the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. The event was the scene of one of the first great propaganda battles in the "cultural Cold War," as the historian Frances Stonor Saunders calls it, and more than a few artistic reputations fell victim to the clash of ideologies. The martyr-in-chief was not Copland but Shostakovich, who had gone to America at Stalin's behest. Weird scenes surrounded Shostakovich from the moment he arrived on American soil. The Broadwood Hotel, in Philadelphia, cancelled a dinner reservation that he had made after it received threats of violence. Demonstrators carried placards exhorting him to speak out or to defect: "Shostakovich, We Understand," "Shostakovich! Jump Thru the Window!" The latter slogan, which was held aloft by a glum young man with a dandyish look, referred to the athletic defection of the schoolteacher Oksana Kasenkina the previous year.

It was not in Shostakovich's nature to jump through the window. He read the speeches that were placed in front of him; he answered questions in accordance with instructions that were whispered in his ear. On the final night of the conference, he played a piano arrangement of the Scherzo of his Fifth Symphony at Madison Square Garden before an audience of eighteen thousand, while two thousand marchers protested outside. Through it all, Shostakovich maintained an indecipherable façade of nervous preoccupation. When the composer Morton Gould sidled up to him in the hope of hearing some candid confession, Shostakovich muttered, "It's hot in here."

Left-leaning American artists of all disciplines and persuasions gathered at the Waldorf to greet their Soviet counterparts. Some attendees came in a spirit of political sympathy, others out of artistic fellow-feeling or curiosity. Henry Wallace was there, and drew cheers as he entered. *Time* snidely observed, "The show might easily have been mistaken for an election rally for Henry Wallace, where the party line was pushed, but not too obviously." Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman, and Arthur Miller also attended. Thomas Mann sent a message of support. Copland's role was especially prominent: he greeted Shostakovich at the airport and sat at the head table with Hellman and Wallace. The event had been covertly overseen by Soviet propagandists, working through the international Cominform organization.

Assembled on the other side of the barricades was a coalition of disenchanted leftists who called themselves Americans for Intellectual Freedom. They holed up in a bridal suite at the Waldorf, determined to stem the tide of Communist propaganda. In the thick of the group was the composer Nicolas Nabokov, a friend of Stravinsky's and a cousin of Vladimir Nabokov's, who had written for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in the nineteen-twenties and then, in 1933, gone to America. His music, close in style to Stravinsky's, was relatively negligible, but his ability to cultivate high-level social and political connections was positively virtuosic, and in the postwar years he showed a Zelig-like ability to position himself in the middle of cultural imbroglios.

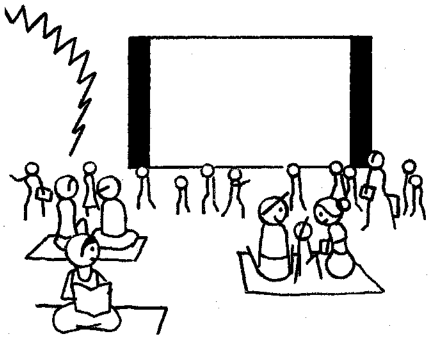
At the end of the war, Nabokov worked in the office of the Information Control Division in Berlin, helping to supervise the reorientation of German cultural life. He then applied for a position in the nascent Central Intelligence Agency; his sponsor was George F. Kennan, a chief architect of American Cold War policy. Failing to receive security clearance—evidently J. Edgar Hoover took a dim view of him—Nabokov decided to devote himself again to composition. Yet, by various twists and turns, he ended up on the C.I.A.'s payroll all the same. Americans for Intellectual Freedom was receiving clandestine support from the C.I.A., which had taken an interest in combatting Soviet influence through the promotion of anti-Communist and pro-democratic cultural activities. Nabokov's subsequent protests that he had no knowledge of the C.I.A. connection are difficult to credit. Surely, when the president of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union handed him a wad of cash to pay the bill at the Waldorf, it must have crossed his mind that all was not as it seemed.

At the Waldorf, members of Americans for Intellectual Freedom fanned out to various speeches and panel discussions. Nabokov zeroed in on a Sunday-morning Fine Arts Panel, at which Shostakovich and Copland were scheduled to appear. The setting for the event was the fabled Starlight Roof ballroom, with its gilt ceiling and crystal chandeliers.

Shostakovich's contribution was a five-thousand-word speech that ranged from music to international politics and on to Soviet domestic policy. It would be too much to say that the composer "delivered" it; he sat in silence while his interpreter read it aloud. The speech attacked Stravinsky for betraying his native Russia and joining the ranks of the Western modernists: "His beginnings were promising . . . but his moral barrenness reveals itself in his openly nihilistic writings, proclaiming the meaninglessness and absence of content in his creations. Stravinsky has no fear of that gaping abyss which separates him from the spiritual life of the people." The speech also denounced "new aspirants for world domination, now engaged in resurrecting the theory and practice of Fascism." This "small clique of hatemongers"—presumably the Cold Warriors of the Truman Administration—were developing weapons of mass destruction that stood in the way of world peace. The speech even criticized Hanson Baldwin, the military-affairs editor of the *Times*, for denigrating the economic status of Soviet Asian regions such as the Uzbek and Tajik republics. The conceit that Shostakovich was an avid reader of military-affairs coverage in the *Times* added a slight comic note to the proceedings. Two guards stood at Shostakovich's side throughout the conference, presumably to prevent him from following Kasenkina out the window.

Copland, despite his lingering pro-Soviet sympathies, observed the spectacle with due skepticism, distancing himself from the propaganda on both sides. At the Fine Arts Panel, he delivered a temperate, thoughtful speech in which he disavowed any political agenda, pointedly remarking that no one had given him a text to read. "I am going to start by saying that I wrote this paper myself," he said. "Nobody told me what to say, and if anybody had tried to tell me what to say, I wouldn't be here." At the heart of the address was an affecting elegy for the lost idealism of the New Deal:

> Lately I've been thinking that the Cold War is almost worse for art than the real thing—for it permeates the atmosphere with fear and anxiety. An artist can function at his best only in a vital and healthy environment for the simple reason that the very act of creation is an affirmative gesture. An artist fighting in a war for a cause he holds just has something affirmative he can believe in. The artist, if he can stay alive, can create art. But throw him into a mood of suspicion, ill-will and dread that typifies the Cold War attitude and he'll create nothing.



Unfortunately, the only part of Copland's speech that drew notice in the papers was this: "The present policies of the American Government will lead inevitably into a third world war."

Nabokov kept his gaze fixed on Shostakovich. He had a history of attacking the Soviet composer in print—in a 1943 article for *Harper's* he declared that the American fad for Shostakovich signalled a decline in cultural values, a slide toward "absolute and immediate comprehensibility to large masses of people"—but he professed to feel some sympathy for the figure who stood before him in 1949. "Throughout the tumultuous conference, I watched his hands twist the cardboard tips of his cigarettes, his face twitch, and his whole posture express intense unease," Nabokov recalled. "He seemed like a trapped man, whose only wish was to be left alone, to the peace of his own art and to the tragic destiny to which he, like most of his countrymen, had been forced to resign himself."

The knowledge that Shostakovich lacked freedom of speech did not prevent Nabokov from forcing him to speak. At the Waldorf panel, the émigré rose from his seat to ask Shostakovich whether he really endorsed the official Soviet condemnation of Western modernists, Stravinsky chief among them. Shostakovich, who privately held Stravinsky's music in high esteem, had no choice but to say, "I fully agree with the statements made in *Pravda*." Decades later, Arthur Miller was still haunted by the memory of Shostakovich's humiliation: "God knows what he was thinking in that room, what splits ran across his spirit."

Several days later, *Life* opened fire on the entire world of Henry Wallace, the New Deal, the Popular Front, and the U.S. Communist Party. A sardonic photo essay on the Waldorf conference highlighted Wallace as the "standout fellow traveler," and a two-page photo gallery identified fifty "dupes and fellow travelers" who were said to be aiding the Communist cause. Copland, spelled "Copeland," appeared alongside Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, Dorothy Parker, Langston Hughes, Charlie Chaplin, and various others who had attended the conference.

In addition, the attack in *Life* indicated that the media's lionization of refugee intellectuals—Einstein and Mann had acquired hero status during the Second World War—was at an end. A "strange rogue's gallery," Mann called the *Life* spread. He had come to America in 1938. Fearing that his adopted homeland was falling victim to the same totalitarian madness that had consumed Germany, he began to think about emigrating once again, and in 1952 he moved to Switzerland, where he died, three years later. Mann had come to America looking for freedom from demonic politics; he did not find it.

When the Waldorf debacle was over, Copland travelled to Paris, where he busied himself with tracking down the latest musical trends. In his student days, he had spent several years in Paris, taking lessons from the master pedagogue Nadia Boulanger and attending performances of works by Stravinsky and the merry-making band of composers known as Les Six. Now, in a letter to the composer Irving Fine and his wife, Verna, Copland reported that he was "ferreting out the dodecaphonistes," by which he meant the twelve-tone composers, who were following in the footsteps of Arnold Schoenberg. In particular, he ferreted out the fearsome Pierre Boulez, who was on the verge of inventing a hyper-complex extension of twelve-tone writing that came to be called "total serialism." Copland ascended the stairs to Boulez's apartment, which occupied two rooms on the top floor of a building in the Marais, and heard the young master play parts of his intricately structured, outwardly violent Second Sonata. "But must we start a revolution all over again?" Copland asked, when it was over. "*Mais oui*," Boulez replied. "*Sans pitié*." The two composers met again a few days later, at a gathering of American expatriates that included the pianist Shirley Gabis and the gifted young composer Ned Rorem. Boulez once more banged out the Second Sonata, to the consternation of the neoclassical Americans. According to Rorem, Copland "stuck it out with a grin." Afterward, he went to the piano to play his own granitic "Piano Variations," from 1930; he wanted to show that "he was just as hairy as Boulez," or so Rorem guessed.

"They're cute. What are they for?"

In the fall of 1949, the question of Copland's politics arose once more in the American media, and in a bizarre way. Schoenberg, who had been living in Southern California since 1934, abruptly took to the airwaves to denounce what he perceived to be a widespread backsliding toward empty-headed populism: "You cannot change the natural evolution of the arts by a command; you may make a New Year's resolution to write only what everybody likes; but you cannot force real artists to descend to the lowest possible standards to give up morals, character, and sincerity, to avoid presentation of new ideas. Even Stalin cannot succeed and Aaron Copland even less."

Virgil Thomson published Schoenberg's bellicose remarks in the *Herald Tribune* and then allowed Copland to respond. Copland wrote, "Mr. Schoenberg must have seen my picture in the papers in company with Shostakovich on the occasion of his brief visit here last spring. In America it is still possible (I hope) to share a forum platform with a man whose musical and political ideas are not one's own without being judged guilty by association."

At the F.B.I., in Washington, D.C., someone opened a file on the composer. ("Alias: Aaron Copeland," it said on one page.) After Copland returned from a six-month tour of Europe and Israel, in 1951, J. Edgar Hoover wrote a note to his counterpart at the C.I.A.: "Copland has been abroad for some time and on June 25, 1951, he arrived in New York from Bombay, India, on TWA flight 6022-C. It would be appreciated if you would furnish this Bureau any information you have received concerning Copland's activities while abroad."

In 1951 and 1952, Copland delivered the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard, in which he sketched an exceptionally clear and canny picture of the ideological divide that was opening up in postwar music. On the one hand, he said, you have the composer of twelve-tone music or other "advanced" styles, who "is no longer writing music to satisfy himself" but instead is fighting "*against* a vocal and militant opposition" of socialist-realist composers. On the other hand, you have the "composer of communist persuasion," who runs the risk of abandoning artistic quality for popular appeal.

Reading between the lines of Copland's flat prose, you can sense his anxiety that he was falling too conspicuously into the second category. He had already been labelled a "fellow traveler" in the pages of *Life*. He had watched as old colleagues, such as Marc Blitzstein and Hanns Eisler, were subjected to interrogation or driven out of the country. As a gay man, he had extra reason to worry: the F.B.I. was conducting separate purges of homosexuals on the theory that they made easy targets for Soviet blackmail.

On January 20, 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower was inaugurated as President. Copland's "Lincoln Portrait" had been scheduled for a preliminary Inaugural Concert by the National Symphony, but, two weeks before the event, Fred Busbey, an Illinois congressman, denounced the work as Communist propaganda and demanded that it be removed from the program. Making the case for Copland as a "fellow traveler," Busbey read a long list of Copland's affiliations into the *Congressional Record*, including his appearance at the Waldorf-Astoria conference; his support of Hanns Eisler, who had been interrogated by the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947 and then deported; and his relationships with such organizations as the American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born, the Artists' Front to Win the War, the Citizens Committee for Harry Bridges, the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, and the American Music Alliance of the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Busbey warned, "As the number of such activities or affiliations increase, any presumption of the innocence of such a person must necessarily decrease."

Copland released a statement couched in the defensive jargon of the day: "I say unequivocally that I am not now and never have been a communist or member of the communist party or of any organization that advocates or teaches in any way the overthrow of the United States Government." Nonetheless, "Lincoln Portrait" was not played for President-elect Eisenhower at Constitution Hall.

Finally, on May 22, 1953, came the dreaded telegram:

> YOU ARE HEREBY DIRECTED TO APPEAR BEFORE THIS COMMITTEE ON MONDAY MAY TWENTYFIFTH AT TWO THIRTY P M ROOM 357 SENATE OFFICE BUILDING WASHINGTON DC – JOE MCCARTHY CHAIRMAN SENATE PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS.

McCarthy did not treat Copland as brutally as he did other witnesses, perhaps because the Senator was interested less in the composer's career than in his educational activities on behalf of the U.S. State Department, which was supposedly riddled with Communists. In a diary, Copland wrote, "My impression is that McCarthy had no idea who I was or what I did." The composer claimed ignorance of the Communist affiliations of the organizations to which he had been linked. Sometimes, he said, his name had been used without his knowledge. In other cases, the associations were tenuous; Copland's role in the Citizens Committee for Harry Bridges had amounted to a one-dollar check. Less sincere was Copland's claim that he had never knowingly consorted with a Party member. Fortunately, McCarthy's investigators did not learn that in 1934 he had given a speech to a rally of Communist farmers in Minnesota.

Copland, having submitted his written response to the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, waited to be called back for a public hearing. But no call materialized. Apparently, he benefitted from the unlikely support of the anti-Communist newspaperman George Sokolsky, who privately urged McCarthy to lay off "one of America's greatest living composers." Still, there were repercussions. For a time, Copland was hassled when he tried to travel abroad; the passport agency declined to renew his passport, and repeatedly requested that he demonstrate affiliations with anti-Communist organizations. In 1953, he had several engagements rescinded on political grounds.

Howard Pollack, in an authoritative biography of Copland published in 1999, points out that the composer's political predicament, tense as it was, did not bring about a wholesale change of style. Copland did not abandon tonality in favor of twelve-tone writing, as Leonard Bernstein, among others, claimed. Only four certifiably twelve-tone works appeared from the time of the Waldorf-Astoria conference onward: the Piano Quartet, the "Piano Fantasy," "Connotations," and "Inscape." These had clear connections to the more dissonant productions of the composer's youth, notably his "Piano Vari-

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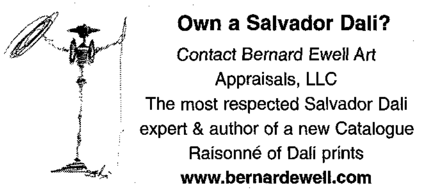
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ations" of 1930. In other postwar pieces, such as the frugally beautiful Emily Dickinson songs of 1949-50, Copland retained a version of his populist manner. All the same, the conspicuous stylistic split that appears in his later music—the almost schizophrenic alternation between a dense, dissonant language and an approachably tonal one—seems symptomatic of the political polarization of the time.

Copland's most ambitious project of the fifties was the opera "The Tender Land," which applied the language of "Billy the Kid" and "Appalachian Spring" to a quietly moving tale of life on the prairie. Erik Johns's libretto had undercurrents of social protest: the community becomes irrationally suspicious of two strangers in its midst, enacting in microcosm the paranoias of McCarthyite America. Taut tonal melodies and spare instrumentation bathe the scene in the familiar Edenic light. Copland hoped that "The Tender Land" would be broadcast on television, but the networks took no interest. The work instead had its première at New York City Opera, where it received weak reviews. Copland's thousand-dollar commissioning fee was a gift from Rodgers and Hammerstein.

With "The Tender Land" almost completely overlooked, Copland's most conspicuous postwar statement was, instead, "Connotations," whose first performance took place in September, 1962. Few American orchestral works have ever enjoyed such a heavy media glare: the occasion of the première was the opening of Philharmonic Hall, the flagship venue of the new Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, in Manhattan. CBS broadcast the concert to a television audience of twenty-six million people. Here was the mass public of which American composers had long dreamed. But Copland was no longer in an ingratiating mood; some sudden rage welled up in him, some urge to confront the gala audience with dark news about the state of the world or to express a private agony that he left unspecified. "Connotations" is by a considerable margin the most dissonant score of Copland's career, and it culminates in an apoplectically orchestrated sequence of chords encompassing all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. At intermission, he was greeted by Jacqueline Kennedy, who had come up from Washington for the event. Ordinarily at ease in cultural settings, the First Lady was rendered more or less speechless. "Oh, Mr. Copland," she said. "Oh, Mr. Copland . . ."

After that barbaric yawp of a piece, Copland's output rapidly dwindled. "Inscape," which Bernstein's Philharmonic played in 1967, was of a more subdued, mysterious character. Copland's last extended work, the Duo for Flute and Piano, from 1971, returns to a language of plain-spoken eloquence, the flute's opening solo sounding like a pastoral version of the adamantine trumpet line that begins "Fanfare for the Common Man." Around the same time, Copland published a poignant little piano piece called "In Evening Air," reviving some music that he had written in 1945 for the Office of War Information documentary "The Cummington Story," which showed how a group of Eastern European refugees were initially spurned and later embraced by a New England town. Some of the same material, including a Polish lullaby, appears in one of his very last works, "Midday Thoughts," from 1982. It's as if Copland were dreaming back to a more hopeful time.

After a point, music stopped running through his head. "It was exactly as if someone had simply turned off a faucet," he told the critic Paul Moor. He began to suffer memory loss, the first sign of the onset of Alzheimer's disease. He died in 1990, at the age of ninety. The epigraph for "In Evening Air," from Theodore Roethke, told the story of his last years: "I see, in evening air,/How slowly dark comes down on what we do."

There is an affecting recording of the elderly Copland rehearsing "Appalachian Spring" with the Columbia Chamber Ensemble. When he reaches the ending, an evocation of the American frontier in ageless majesty, his reedy, confident Brooklyn voice turns sweet and sentimental: "Softer, *sul tasto*, *misterioso*, great mood here. . . . That's my favorite place in the whole piece. . . . Organlike. It should have a very special quality, as if you weren't moving your bows. . . . That sounds too timid. It should sound rounder and more satisfying. Not distant. Quietly present. No diminuendos, like an organ sound. Take it freshly again, like an Amen." Copland conjures a perfect American Sunday in which the music of all peoples streams from the open doors of a white-steepled church that does not yet exist. ♦

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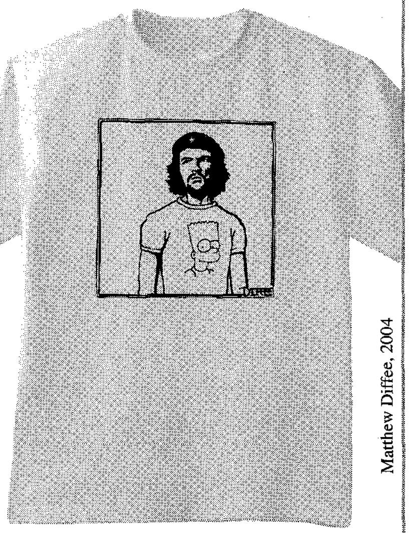

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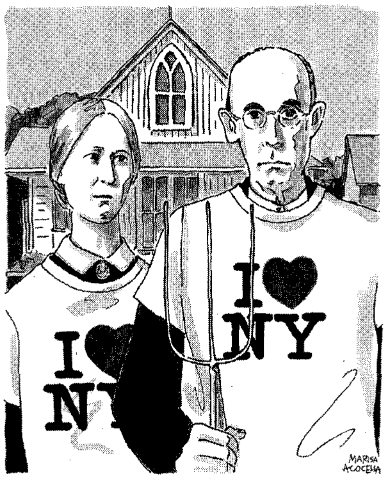

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

MY MEGA MILLIONS

BY LARRY DOYLE

I'm going to do a lot of fishing.
—*Ed Nabors, the co-winner of a three-hundred-and-ninety-million-dollar Mega Millions jackpot.*

What am I going to do with my Mega Millions? Good question. Here's a hundred dollars.

The truth is, I haven't really thought about it. I mean, I suppose I'll have to hire a lawyer to start preëmptively suing people who claim that I owe them money or fathered them or blinded them in a bar fight. And I'll need bodyguards with double-0 clearance, for insurance purposes. And another lawyer to sue the first lawyer. But, beyond that, my life is going to stay pretty much the way it is, only with the Mega Millions.

Cheryl has been a good wife, financially supporting me all these years while I pursued my dream of winning the Mega Millions, and I'd like to keep her. She's not really a Mega Millionaire's wife, though, as she would be the first to admit. However, in light of all her years of loyal service, I'm going to give her first crack at the position.

Out of my own pocket, I'm advancing Cheryl up to three hundred thousand dollars for a series of upgrades. She has all sorts of complaints about her face that, frankly, I don't see, but, fine, we'll fix all that stuff. We'll also be installing state-of-the-art breasts, right above the original ones, which we'll keep around for old times' sake to remind us where we came from. To go with her new Mega Millions looks, Cheryl will be getting extensive training in trophy-wiving from Melania Trump, on loan from my new friend Don, at a special discounted rate.

I do hope it all works out, because Cheryl was with me back when it all started. All those scratch-offs. All that black stuff all over the bed. She's probably wishing that she hadn't bitched so much about it now.

As for me, I can't think of anything I want. Hair, maybe. Specifically, George Clooney's. So far, he's been unwilling to part with it at any price, but we'll see how he feels about playing Khrushchev or Gorbachev or Blofeld or Mr. Clean in the new movie I'm financing. Plus, he travels a lot, often to countries where it's possible to get what you want done done. You know what—that was off the record. Oh, and I forgot: here's a thousand dollars for each of you.

Also, I may get a heart transplant, just as a precaution.

We're going to keep the old house. We love the neighborhood, and we'll love it even more without a lot of the neighbors. We'll probably do some additions, preserving the original house as a centerpiece in the new living room, or maybe as a playhouse for all those grandkids we will no longer be denied. Cheryl's going to be too busy pleasing me to take care of a house that large, so we'll need some kind of staff: just a few French maids, one of those sinewy masseuses with Chinese tattoos, some house lawyers, a night masseuse, and a butler. A really good butler, from England.

Out back, I'd love to put in a small lake, where Mike McKenzie's place is now. We'll dock the yacht there, and copter it to whichever coast, as necessary. I haven't decided what to stock the lake with, but I've been thinking a lot about the environment now that I'll be owning so much of it. And it seems to me that the "greenest" thing to do would be to get a bunch of those *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit models, brush some scales on them with biodegradable body paint, strap each one in a helmet rigged with a giant eyehook or an industrial-strength magnet on top, and toss them in. Maybe. Like I said, I haven't given it much thought. But I guess the short answer to your question is: I'm going to do a lot of fishing. ♦

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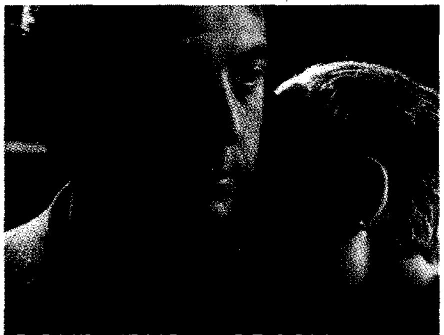

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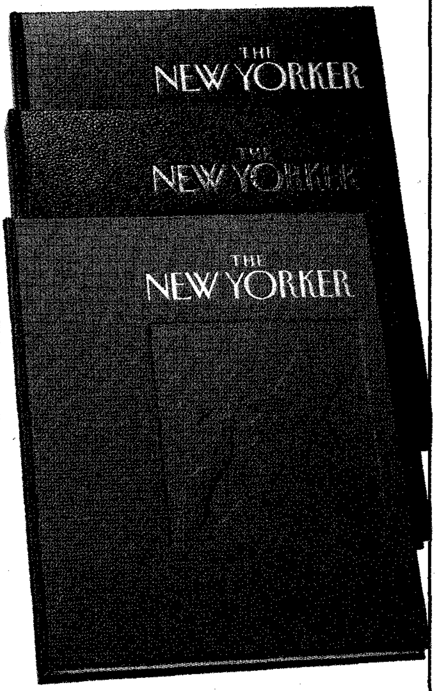

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LETTER FROM FRANCE

THE HUMAN BOMB

The Sarkozy regime begins.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

To understand Nicolas Sarkozy, who has been President of France for three intense months, it helps to know the story of the human bomb. "It was in 1993, when Sarkozy was the mayor of Neuilly," Philippe Labro, the novelist and talk-show host, recalled over lunch a week or so after Sarkozy received his first Bastille Day salute as President. (Neuilly is a small leafy suburb of Paris.) "A psychotic took over a nursery school. He strapped explosives to his body, and he held the children hostage. He called himself H.B., the human bomb. He had an incoherent set of demands—a true lunatic—and the police surrounded the place. Sarkozy went into the school, completely alone, and began to talk to the human bomb. He engaged him in conversation: what did he want, what were his problems, could he solve them? But first he had to let the children go. Well, half an hour later, out comes Nicolas with children in his arms and all around him. Later, of course, the police went in and shot the human bomb dead." He shrugged. The French police are not known for their gentle touch with psychos.

"This was the first time that many people in France had even heard of Nicolas Sarkozy," Labro went on. "That was the moment he was introduced to the French people. Two things were apparent. Courage? Yes. But also an almost crazy appetite for living on the edge that is completely outside the normal experience of French politicians. He *likes* risks, enjoys risks, revels in risks."

In the days since the election, the sense of Sarkozy as a risk-taker has grown stronger, and so has the sense that he is something of a human bomb himself, an unknown explosive quantity whose ends and effects are hard to gauge. His timer is ticking. This makes his aura in France very different from his aura in America, where no French personality since Brigitte Bardot has been such a projection screen for wishful dreams and onanistic fantasies. The fantasy on the American right is that he is staunchly pro-American, pro-market, and sympathetic to the Republican agenda. Like Bardot, though—an extreme French nationalist who turned out to love animals more than Americans—he is bound to disappoint as they discover who he really is and what he really wants: a French nationalist with a rage for modernization, and largely European horizons. His French supporters, meanwhile, who understand this, admire his confidence and his daring. But the human-bomb factor casts a sense of portent over what is, in other respects, an enormous sense of possibility.

Though Parisians who voted for Sarkozy would like to believe that the feeling in the city is "Blairite," it is really nothing like the spirit of May, 1997, in London—a moment that, in retrospect, seems almost Kennedyesque in its exuberance and willed innocence. The feeling in Paris is more like the spirit surrounding the ascension, in 1992, of Bill Clinton, a politician whom Sarkozy (said to be an avid "West Wing" viewer) admires and emulates: old doubts about the "character" of the new guy are for the moment overwhelmed by his energy, his brains, and his obvious gifts—but lying in wait is a strident, powerful opposition that, with an intensity that seems to an outsider disproportionate to any offense, hates him, really *hates* him, and is waiting for a chance to get even.

Sarkozy, knowing this, spent his first two months engineering a series of audacious tactical coups that were of exactly the human-bomb type: walking up to dangerous men and defusing them. He disarmed the two most potent politicians in the Socialist Party—the international activist Bernard Kouchner, whom he made his foreign minister, and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the finance minister for the former Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, whom he got appointed head of the International Monetary Fund. At the same time, by talking tough on immigration and crime he stole votes, mostly in the South, from the extreme-right National Front—whose leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, had made it to the final round of the previous Presidential election. He brought many of Le Pen's supporters into his own party, even at the price of being mildly respectful to the evil old man.

Yet politicians who are in a position of strength and have radical programs, Thatchers and Reagans, do not fill their cabinets with members of the opposition, since they understand that members of the opposition are likely eventually to oppose them. And so there are doubts about whether Sarkozy has any strategic vision to go along with the tactical brilliance, any plan for France beyond the old one of getting power and keeping it.

There are certain realities of Sarkozy's position that are easily overlooked—again, not unlike Clinton's in 1992. His election, over the Socialist Ségolène Royal, was far from a rout; and in the legislative elections that were held the following month, as a kind of consolation for the losers, he actually *lost* ground. A stronger Socialist candidate—Strauss-Kahn, say—could likely have won the election for the left. The election was really won only on the night of the Presidential debate a few days before the final round of voting, when Royal harangued Sarkozy for two and a half hours about his weaknesses and flaws as a man and as a politician. This allowed Sarkozy to look wistfully harried and play the one part that he had never had the chance to play before—a sympathetic, erring middle-class French husband being blasted by a furious wife.

Gossip swirls around Paris about Sarkozy's relationship with his own wife, the darkly beautiful Cécilia, as it did in Washington about the Clintons, but it tends to come down to a fairly coherent story, which is that both have had romantic attachments outside their marriage but have come back together now not from convenience but out of real passion—he adores her the way short, ambitious men adore beautiful women who are taller than they are but tolerate their advances. He sent her off to Tripoli to rescue the Bulgarian nurses—a group of unfortunate women who had been sentenced to death by a Libyan court on the implausible charge of deliberately injecting Libyan children with H.I.V. She brought the nurses back, but there have been allegations—strongly denied—that the mission's success was connected to an arms deal between the Libyans and the French. Anyway, there seemed something unduly personal about using one's family, rather than the usual channels of Euro diplomacy, to make an international deal, even an impeccably humanitarian one.

Gerald Scarfe

One observer notes Sarkozy's "crazy appetite for living on the edge."

GERALD SCARFE

People close to Sarkozy like to say that he is an American manqué, meaning that in the normal run of twentieth-century things, his family—Greek Jews on his mother's side, minor Hungarian nobles on his father's—would have kept going west and ended up in New York, where he would now be running a private bank and sitting on museum boards. But an American manqué is not at all the same thing as someone who is pro-American. He is not reflexively opposed to American interests, as Mitterrand was and as Chirac became. The point of his so-called Americanness, though, is to be able to act the way an American would if he were running France. He is surrounded by people who admire and understand America, but what they have taken from it is the habit of high-spirited enterprise and self-assertion. Sarkozy is a statist, unrepentant and unreformed, and determined to use the levers of government for its own good. By "reform" Sarkozy means growth and a crash course in modernization. By reform, he means, in a nutshell, anything to catch up with London. He is eager, even desperate, to modernize France—to make it competitive on every front with the other leading Western nations—but he does not place any particular value on doing it chiefly through entrepreneurial capitalism outside the control of the state. He would like to lame the unions—he has already proposed, and in part achieved, legislation to compel minimum services during transportation and education strikes—but he does not embrace the rest of the Thatcherite program of liberalism. His model for the future is something more like the Airbus program: a pan-European, state-centered, semi-private enterprise to catch up with and outdo those American airplanes. (In fact, one of his first acts was to help streamline the Airbus bureaucracy, which previously had two parallel French and German lines of descent, just as one of his first acts was to ask Angela Merkel, the German premier, to lunch with Airbus workers in Toulouse.)

Although Sarkozy appointed Kouchner (who had supported the removal of Saddam Hussein) to the foreign office, he remains as hostile to the Iraq war as Chirac was. His first public speech, the

"I try to do my part."

• •

day of his election, sent a friendly greeting to America, then implicitly rebuked the Bush Administration for expecting everyone to do as they were told ("Friendship is also accepting the fact that friends can think differently"). Soon he flew off to embrace Angela Merkel.

If there is a political creed behind Sarkozy's government-of-all-the-talents populism, his urge to transcend party or policy, it can be found in what people call his Bonapartism. Bonapartism does not mean simply the possession of power by a short, ambitious man. It refers as well to a coherent ideology, which flourished in the nineteenth century, when the original Napoleon's nephew, Louis-Napoleon, campaigned for, and eventually led, a Second Empire. Louis-Napoleon, who from 1848 until the disaster of the Franco-Prussian War, in 1871, ruled and modernized France—still its longest-serving head of state since the end of the *ancien régime*—gave form to a Bonapartism without a little general to lead it. His rule was by turns statist and entrepreneurial, devoted to French power and its extension, and not at all allergic to grand plans of rebuilding and the celebration of novelty.

This kind of Bonapartism has features that set it apart from monarchism or Republicanism or the monarchical-republican hybrid of Gaullism: where those are essentially conservative in rhetoric and rural by ritual, appealing to *la France profonde* and insisting on continuity even as change takes place ("the Quiet Power" was the Socialist Mitterrand's slogan and self-description), Bonapartism is deliberately disruptive, urban, friendly to large capital, desperate for reform. Nostalgia for an organic, agrarian past has become a left-wing conceit now; Ségolène Royal became widely known for having received an "A.O.C.," a certificate of appellation, for *cabichou*, a goat cheese from her region of Poitou-Charentes; it was *her* human-bomb moment, and she appeared in folk costume to present it. This is why some in Chirac's circle were sure that Sarkozy could never win: not because he seemed vaguely Jewish and foreign but because he was inarguably Parisian. Yet the Bonapartist tradition is very much that of an outsider—whether Corsican or Greek-Hungarian—in a Parisian setting: opportunistic, authoritarian, maneuvering, personality-cultish, and successful. Louis-Napoleon remade Paris into the city we see today, boulevards and cafés alike. It is a creed that can be philistine—the recent Sarkozite claim that France suffers from too much thinking is pure Bonapartism. But its ideal would be to make Paris a world capital once again, however that had to be done. And this time there is no Bismarck at the gates, only a friendly German *Frau*, waiting to hug you as you plot to extend your influence.

As Sarkozy has aced the Socialists and delighted the humanitarians, some of his sharpest critics lie among those on the "liberal" pro-market right. One might have thought that Philippe Manière, whose 1998 book "The French Blindness" was an influential manifesto for radical pro-market change, would be pleased with Sarkozy's election; he is, instead, a doubter, even a heretic.

"There is no sign of a real reform agenda," Manière, who now directs the Montaigne Institute, a think tank based in Paris, says. "France needs reform on the supply side, reforms in the way we work and make, and instead all we have are demand-side reforms. And he's proposing things like a mortgage deduction—at a time of a big international property bubble. That's the last thing we need, more encouragement for the property bubble! Too often, the reforms are minimal, symbolic, or compromised in advance. I very much fear the disappointment that will set in within six months. Unless a global wave of growth buoys him up, very little of what he has done can increase French productivity or internal growth."

Some suspect that Sarkozy's secret strength in resolving the French economic "crisis" may be that there is no crisis. Over the past few years, the stock market has hummed along, and the quality of French life remains remarkably high. Every French worker is still guaranteed those five weeks of vacation, and though the thirty-five-hour week is a folly, it is not a scandal. At the same time, Sarkozy has acted aggressively to create what amounts to the first program of affirmative action in high places in France, including choosing a Muslim woman, Rachida Dati, as the minister of justice. Even the philosopher Pascal Bruckner, who predicted the riots in the poor suburbs in 2005 and does not underestimate the intensity of Muslim alienation—the Muslim vote ran overwhelmingly against Sarkozy, and among his fiercest opponents are many Muslims—thinks in retrospect that the riots were more "American" than they might have seemed at first: that they were mostly a cry of excluded people demanding inclusion in the French state, rather than a first intifada of people who wish to remain outside it, or remake it in the image of their own faith. (A poll last year showed that almost as many French Muslims think of themselves as French first and Muslim second as think of themselves as Muslims first and French second.) Sarkozy is said by those who know him to have a distaste for *bien pensant* clichés of minority appeasement—he feels that tolerance runs two ways—but he believes in inclusion on the American model, and thinks, perhaps too optimistically, that the problem can be dealt with by providing better jobs and more Muslim faces in big roles.

On a recent Sunday morning, in an office directly across from the Élysée Palace, Jean-David Levitte, the former French Ambassador to the United States, who is Sarkozy's leading diplomatic counseller—in effect his national-security adviser—and who is generally thought to be the real point man of Sarkozy's foreign policy, was receiving visitors in his shirtsleeves, showing them in and out himself, in an Americanized gesture from a French man of state.

"I had hardly known Sarkozy at all until he asked me to come back and take this role and I accepted," he said. "And I discovered that he has been brooding for twenty years about what he would do if he became President. His ideas are clear, down to details. Chirac spent years planning to become President, but when he got to be President he was left with an ambiguous program. Sarkozy wants to do it differently. There won't be another December, 1995"—the period, half a year into Chirac's Presidency, when France was crippled by general strikes—"because he has planned well, and because the overwhelming majority of the French know that they want reform, and that that is what they voted for."

Levitte is in his early sixties, understated and mildly ironic, and did hard diplomatic labor in Washington during the Iraq crisis, soothing the tempers of all but the most irate Francophobes. "There was purpose in Sarkozy's appointment of Kouchner," he went on. "There is no naïveté about him. He understands the most realist of Realpolitik. But he understands as well that we cannot move and charge the French people without appealing to their sense of justice and values. To become reëngaged with the world, they need to perceive French policy as uncynical, they must be convinced that it is humane and large-spirited. So: with the Bulgarian nurses, this cost him something, but he mentioned it in his first address to the nation. This is a case where moral politics and real politics are the same thing. It's a way of fighting xenophobia, an inherent suspicion of the world."

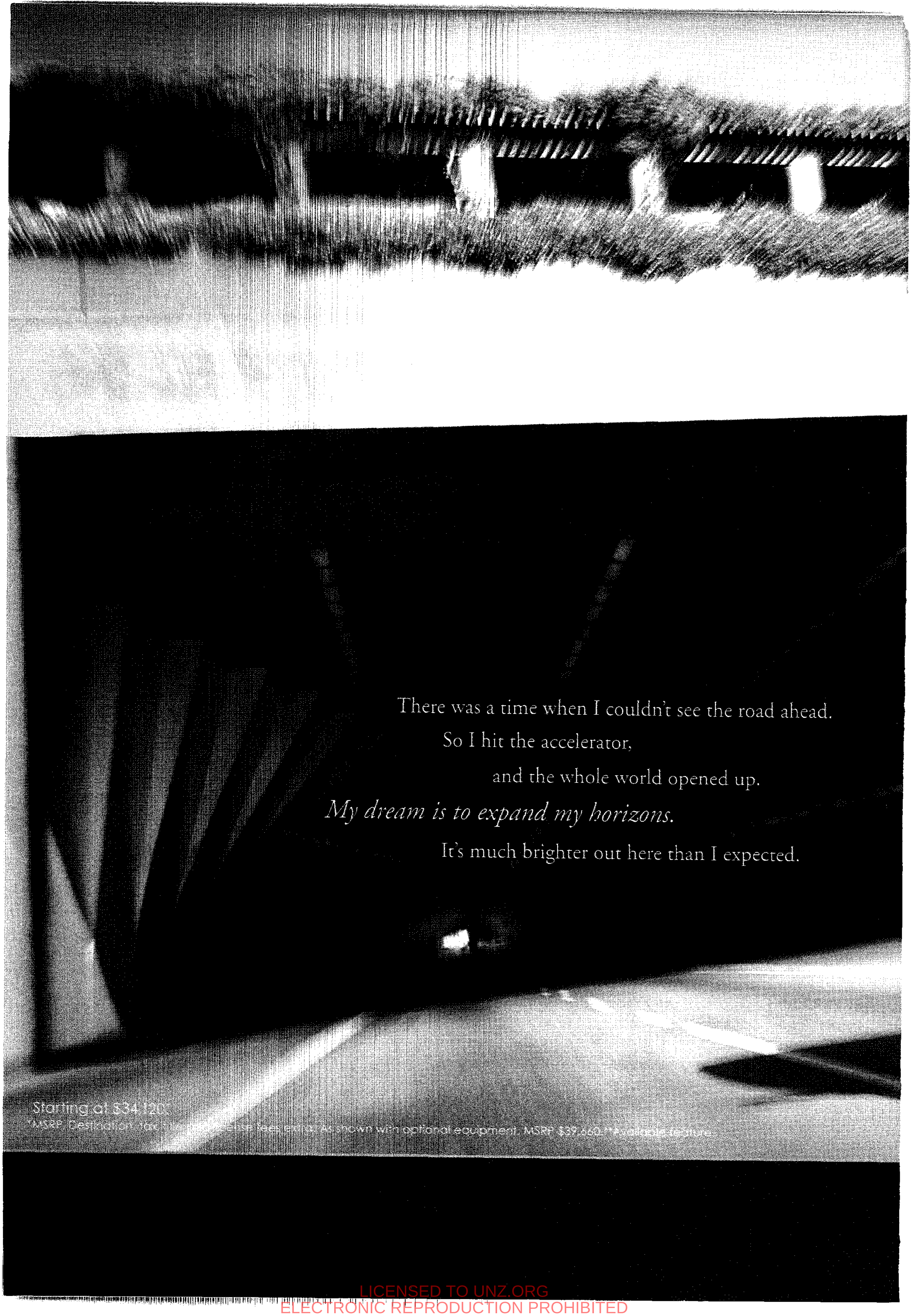
He continued, "With America, he wants the normal relations we've always had. But he is capable of candor there, too. When Sarkozy met Condoleezza Rice, she said, 'What can I do for you?' And he said, bluntly, 'Improve your image in the world. It's difficult when the country that is the most powerful, the most successful—that is, of necessity, the leader of our side—is one of the most unpopular countries in the world. It presents overwhelming problems for you and overwhelming problems for your allies. So do everything you can to improve the way you're perceived—that's what you can do for me.' I think it's entirely possible; the reservoir of good will has been drained somewhat, but it is far from dry. Look how much the image of France has changed in the United States in eight weeks."

Sarkozy's decision to spend his summer vacation in New Hampshire and have lunch with George W. Bush in Maine was widely regarded in France not as obsequiousness but as pure human-bombism: walk right up to the man considered dangerous and disarm him by talking calmly over a hot dog. The effect aimed for was not so much audacity as anomie: Sarkozy is trying to remove the drama from Franco-American relations by making them "normal." I'm in the neighborhood—let's have lunch. The larger, implicit point is that the threatening thing is not really that threatening.

The catastrophe in Iraq has had an unlooked-for effect: not to stoke anti-Americanism in a new generation but to make America seem almost marginal. For almost two hundred years, Americanization in Europe has been synonymous with modernization—that's why the Statue of Liberty stands in New York Harbor, as a gift of the Third French Republic, the fraught state that appeared after Louis-Napoleon's Second Empire failed. It was a gift not from a complacent old world to a nascent new one but from a newborn republic to one that, after its civil war, was firm and coherent. The point wasn't that Europe would not abandon us; it was that we would not abandon old Europe to the despots.

Now, for the first time, it's possible to imagine modernization as something independent of Americanization: when people in Paris talk about ambitious kids going to study abroad, they talk about London. (Americans have little idea of the damage done by the ordeal that a routine run through immigration at J.F.K. has become for Europeans, or by the suspicion and hostility that greet the most anodyne foreigners who come to study or teach at our scientific and educational institutions.) When people in Paris talk about manufacturing might, they talk about China; when they talk about tall buildings, they talk about Dubai; when they talk about troubling foreign takeovers, they talk about Gazprom. The Sarkozy-Gordon Brown-Merkel generation is not unsympathetic to America, but America is not so much the primary issue for them, as it was for Blair and Chirac, in the nineties, when America was powerful beyond words. To a new leadership class, it sometimes seems that America is no longer the human bomb you have to defuse but the nut you walk away from.

What Brown, Merkel, and Sarkozy all have in common is that they do not want to be defined by their response to America—either unduly faithful, as with Blair, or unduly hostile, as Chirac became. Instead, as Levitte says, they all want to normalize relations with a great power that is no longer the only power. Its military weakness has been exposed in Iraq, its economic weakness by the rise of the euro, and its once great cultural magnetism has been diminished by post-9/11 paranoia and insularity. America has recovered from worse before, and may do so again. But it is also possible that the election of Nicolas Sarkozy may be seen not as the start of a new pro-American moment in Europe but as a marker of the beginning of the post-American era. ♦



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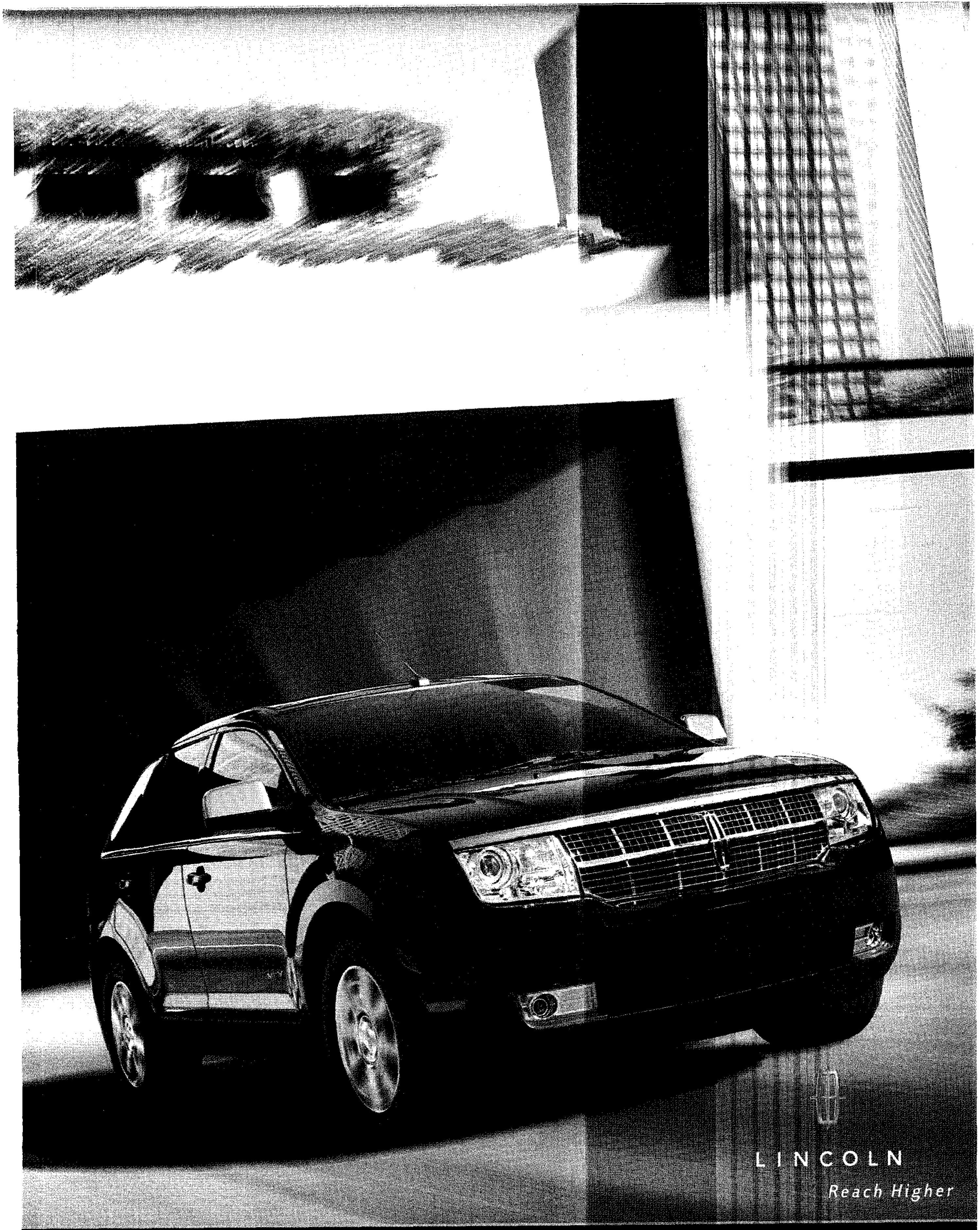

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PROFILES

HE THAT PLAYS THE KING

Ian McKellen's meticulous theatricality.

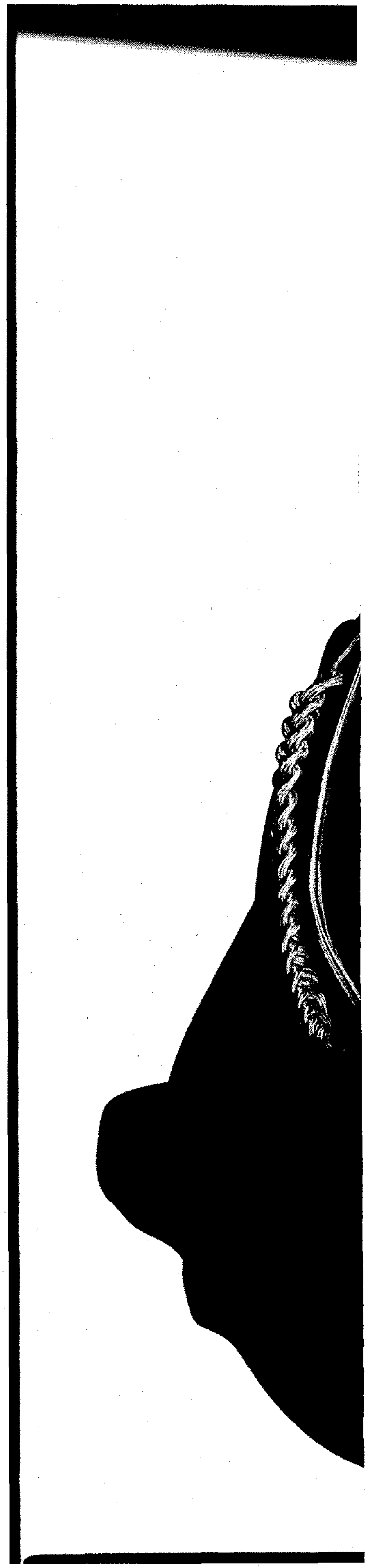
BY JOHN LAHR

Strolling through Limehouse, in London's East End, you pass streets, like Shoulder of Mutton Alley, that still give off a whiff of Elizabethan hurly-burly, and ancient pubs like the Grapes, which has been serving ale from the same spot since 1583. Soon you come to Sir Ian McKellen's narrow five-story house, which was built in 1733. McKellen had the place renovated in 2000, while he was away in New Zealand being Gandalf the Grey, the hoary-haired wizard in "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring," which grossed nearly a billion dollars worldwide and made McKellen, in his sixties, an international star. At the far end of the house's paintings-crammed ground floor, beyond McKellen's writing desk, is a dormer window, and beyond the window, no more than twenty feet away, the murky Thames rolls by, carrying the dust of ages.

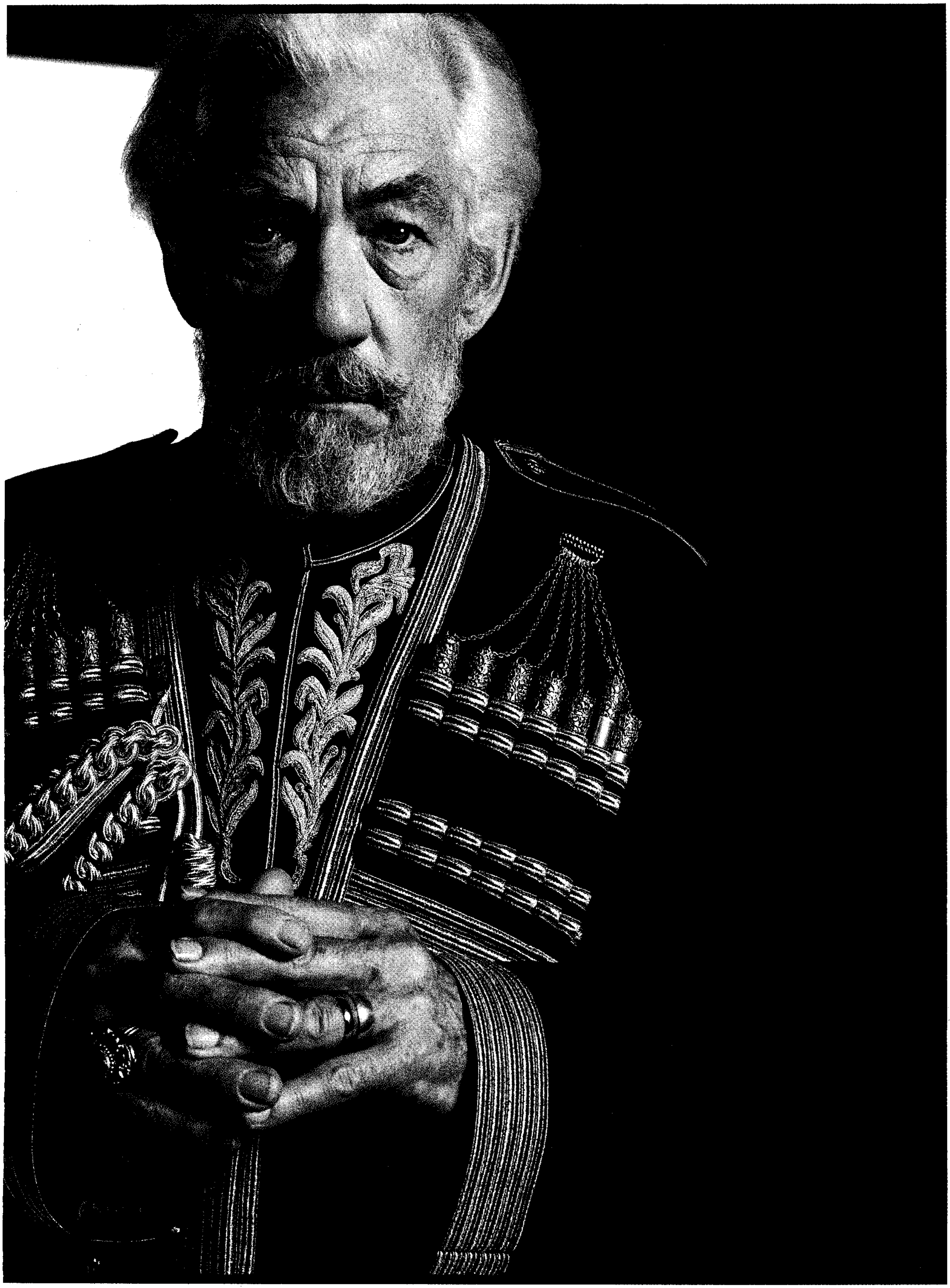
McKellen is also a conduit of history. Since his first professional performance, in the Belgrade Theatre Company's 1961 production of "A Man for All Seasons," in Coventry, he reckons that he has "never been out of work." His adult life has been spent between the rehearsal room, the stage, and the movie set. One of the era's great classical actors, he has played most of Shakespeare's major heroes and villains, including Macbeth, Iago, Richard II, and Richard III (in a stellar modern-dress interpretation that he reprised for the 1995 film, directed by Richard Loncraine). Last January, McKellen began rehearsals for a season in the Royal Shakespeare Company's productions of "King Lear" and Chekhov's "The Seagull." (Both plays, directed by Sir Trevor Nunn, will be at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in September.) This is the third "King Lear" in which McKellen has featured—he was Edgar in the 1974 Actors' Company production, which also played at BAM, and the Earl of Kent in a 1990 production—but, at sixty-eight, he is attempting the part of Lear for the first time. The R.S.C. tour is a test of McKellen's redoubtable stamina: he performs Lear four times a week and Chekhov's Soren twice. Playing Lear, he told me, is "the most difficult thing I've ever done."

McKellen has grown up and grown old with the British public, which accounts for some of the intensity of his relationship with his audience. He sees the enterprise of acting as a kind of service industry, and the fact that a large portion of the stories through which he has won renown are Shakespeare's gives the task, for him, a certain moral purpose. "I'm not just doing it to satisfy myself," he said. "I'm doing it because I know that, if the audience only gets this story and the way that it is written, their lives are going to be changed. That's the preacher in me." He added, "I'm very sentimental about Stratford. I die as King Lear a hundred yards from where Shakespeare died, a hundred yards from where he's buried. It's very moving that he was an actor. It all happened because, like me, he'd seen actors at work when he was a kid. He's one of us. So there's a sort of responsibility to do your very best by him."

Over the years, McKellen has reached out as happily to the hoi polloi as to the highbrows. In 2006, playing the leering Widow Twankey in a pantomime version of "Aladdin" at London's Old Vic, he tapped into his music-hall roots and discovered his inner Dame, a lewd, garish old tart who, according to his Cambridge contemporary the director Stephen Frears, echoed "all the Northern comics he would have seen—Norman

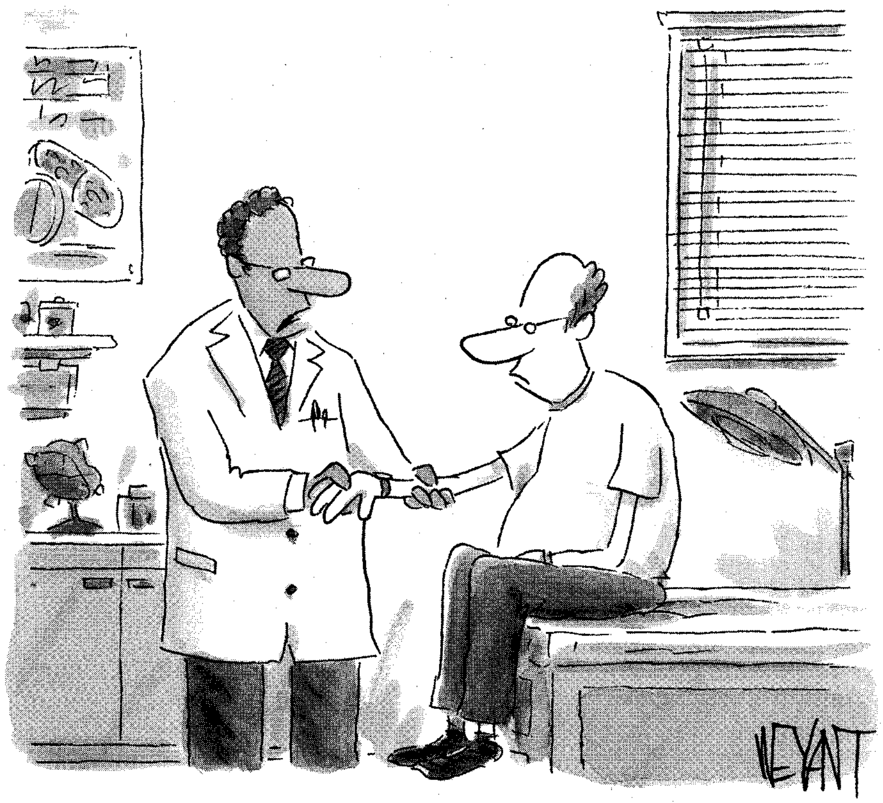


Though his role as Gandalf in "The Lord of the Rings" made him an international star, McKellen remains at heart a man of the stage. Photograph by Steve Pyke.



Evans, Frank Randle, and Les Dawson.” McKellen’s democratic appetite for performance has also extended to guest appearances on the venerable North Country soap opera “Coronation Street,” “Extras,” “The Simpsons,” and “Saturday Night Live,” which he hosted in 2002, as well as appearances in the movie “The Da Vinci Code” and the “X-Men” and “Lord of the Rings” trilogies. In 1994, McKellen, who calls himself a “front man” for gay activism in Britain, took the pitcher’s mound at Yankee Stadium before a crowd of fifty thousand to close the Gay Games. “Good evening, I’m Sir Ian McKellen,” he said. “But you can call me Serena.”

In person, there is nothing camp or frivolous about McKellen. On the overcast May morning when we first met, his ease and accessibility were reflected in his dress—a blue T-shirt, jeans, and low-top green sneakers. McKellen has a large head, made even larger these days by the unruly mass of white hair and beard he has grown for the role of Lear. His face is a craggy terrain, and the bags under his heavy-lidded eyes have deepened and drooped. But, if McKellen’s face carries the striations of time, his body doesn’t. He is tall and supple, with a dancer’s form that he enjoys showing off. (He has stripped onstage for “Coriolanus” and stepped out of a shower in a TV documentary; in the storm scene of “King Lear,” he stands truly naked against the elements.) When he talks, he has a tendency to act out his anecdotes. Leaning on the black marble counter of his mauve kitchen, he said, “Every night when I lift Cordelia—she stands on a chair and I lift her in the wings—I think, Ow! Ian, you should have gone and done some more exercises.” He suddenly tottered toward me with the imaginary princess in his arms. “The role isn’t as tiring as I thought,” he added. “Perhaps because it’s often played by men who are older. At the end of ‘Hamlet’ you’ve got a fight. At the end of ‘Macbeth’ you’ve got a fight. At the beginning of ‘Coriolanus’ you have a fight. You’re forever running here, there, and everywhere. Lear doesn’t run. He’s a talker. Where it’s wearing on you is emotionally and mentally. I do feel I’ve had that sort of workout by the end of the evening.”



“Although it’s nothing serious, let’s keep an eye on it to make sure it doesn’t turn into a major lawsuit.”

McKellen walked out onto his patio overlooking the Thames. Greenwich was upriver to the left, and just visible on the right were the peaked roofs of Tower Bridge. To mark the beginning of the new millennium, McKellen threw a sit-down dinner for forty on New Year’s Eve, 1999. “One of the entertainments for the evening was going to be watching the Queen going upriver to the Millennium Dome,” he recalled. “A really unattractive boat came chugging up the river. She was on City Cruises! If she hadn’t been wearing lime green, one wouldn’t have noticed. We wanted proper people rowing her up. . . . I wanted her to do the job superbly.”

As a master of theatrical ceremony, McKellen has given a lot of thought to the notion of royal ritual and performance. “Your kingship is created entirely by the way other people react to you,” he said. His Lear enters the stage to a show of worship that contains a warning: nobody is to approach. Still, because his authority is absolute, he speaks softly at first; he doesn’t need to raise his voice. “He holds all the cards,” McKellen said. He added, “Having seen power people at close quarters, functioning, is essential if you are going to be convincing.” (At a dance at Buckingham Palace recently, McKellen and his friend Dame Judi Dench—they were Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the towering 1976 Trevor Nunn production at the R.S.C.—went behind the bandstand and “had a little sit on the throne.”) In his study of royals, McKellen claimed to have uncovered “a few tricks.” One is slowness: his Lear progresses at a snail’s pace among his prostrate subjects. “They go very slowly, to imprint on your memory that moment,” McKellen said. “You don’t know anybody in the world who goes that slowly.” He recalled rushing out of the R.S.C.’s Aldwych Theatre to watch the Queen’s Silver Jubilee parade, in 1977: “No cars parked, no buses, no traffic. You’re suddenly aware that the whole place is a set. You hear birds. Around the bend comes this car, unlike any other car I’ve ever seen. It’s got glass all around. This car’s going at ten miles an hour. Everything is unusual. Inside it, these two dolls clearly made up. I found myself waving. And what was I waving at? The two richest people in the country, actually. That's why it won't do when she comes up the Thames on City Cruises. Far too democratic."

At the age of three, McKellen was taken to see his first play, "Peter Pan," in Manchester, ten miles from the mining town of Wigan, where he grew up. "It was an exciting thing," he said. "We had to leave early to catch the train. I never found out how the story ended. I said to myself, 'I'll be back.' It was uncompleted business."

His father, Denis McKellen, who was a borough civil engineer, played the piano. His mother, Margery, dabbled in amateur dramatics. Both preferred theatregoing to movies. Once a week, they took in a play and frequently brought their son. By twelve, McKellen was attending plays on his own. "I fell in love with the theatre entirely as an audience," he said. Performances of any kind delighted him. The circus came to town twice a year, with its panoply of sideshows. McKellen loved to watch the roustabouts put up the tents. "They were the first men I was attracted to: long hair, tight trousers, dirty hands. Anyone would have fallen for them."

"If you don't want the real-estate section, can I take a look at it?"

• •

Around the age of six, McKellen made his début on a platform stage, playing his mother's son in an amateur church production about a group of American Quakers whose meeting-house was invaded by Indians. He wore a Puritan collar made out of a Kellogg's Corn Flakes box. "I remember being quite comfortable in the bright lighting," he said. "One warrior was putting on his body paint and he told me not to be frightened of him for real—he was only acting, he said. I remember thinking, Of course you are! What an idiot to think I confused theatre with life!" Margery, according to McKellen, "loved going to the theatre, loved actors, loved acting." He added, "One of the few things I know my mother said about my acting—she said it to my aunt—'If Ian does become an actor, it's a wonderful job because it brings pleasure to a lot of people.' I was comforted by that. I needed my parents' approval, and in death I had it from her."

McKellen's mother died of breast cancer when he was twelve. His father moved Ian and his older sister, Jean, to Bolton around that time, and remarried when Ian was fourteen. For about two years, as a teen-ager, McKellen went every week to Bolton's Grand Theatre, a somewhat down-at-the-heels variety theatre owned by a friend of his father, who allowed the stagestruck lad to watch acts from backstage. "I got to see these professionals in the wings, stepping into the light and transforming," he said. "I'd been let in on their secret." In McKellen's mind, theatre was increasingly an alternate family to his own problematic one. "The significance of the Grand was not just the crucial introduction to professional performers on the job but also having some independence from home and school, meeting people my family and friends didn't know," he said.

The McKellens, who were progressive, were staunch about small things—no tea, no coffee, no alcohol—and about large ones. "We were do-gooders," he said. "You were here on this earth to leave the world a better place than you found it." The family took in evacuees, a German prisoner of war, and, according to McKellen, "the first black man to appear in Wigan." "I can remember walking out with him in Wigan," McKellen said of their African guest. "By the time we'd got to the town center, there'd be a crowd of kids following us. They'd never seen a black man. None of us had. It's entirely typical of our family to have welcomed a stranger in. What I didn't realize at the time was that I was a stranger myself in the midst of this."

McKellen's family may have been freethinking, but he never discussed his homosexuality at home. "You didn't lie in our house," he said. "That was hard for me because, in not talking about myself, I was lying. Is it any wonder that under that sort of pressure, day in day out, eventually you give in, and say, 'All right, yes, I'm queer'? It's quite a small step from saying 'I am unusual' to saying 'I shouldn't be the way I am.' You invent your own homophobia. You hate yourself. And, oh, it hurts. I am still hurt by it." Inevitably, McKellen's dissimulation imposed a distance between him and his parents. "I didn't talk to them about anything important," he said. "It was dreadful. We never got a proper relationship going." His father died in a car accident in 1964, when McKellen was twenty-five. "We were amicable," McKellen said. "We weren't friends."

THE FEVER

The coral reefs are changing color,
the black and crimson bleached away:
the ocean's rising fever,

in every drop the seas over,
damages the membrane of symbiotic algae
and coral reefs change their color.

True, it's less sensational than acts of terror.
True, we can slather sunblock, then sunbathe,
despite the ocean's rising fever.

After all, the planet isn't broiling over;
algae is not an inflamed country.
It's just coral reefs, changing color.

I wonder if it's, yet again, the ozone layer
ruined by my aunt's persistent use of hairspray—
this ocean's rising fever?

I already own my share of vivid jewelry
from Mother's childhood village on Maui.
Still, the living are losing color
in my ocean's escalating fever.

—*Kimiko Hahn*

"Theatre embraces you. Within that, there's love—love of all sorts," McKellen told me. When he was confused about the direction of his life, the theatre gave him plots; when he couldn't parse his feelings, it gave him words; when he was bewildered about his private identity, it gave him a persuasive public one. "I knew John Gielgud was queer," he said. "Noël Coward. Oscar Wilde had been. There was no gay life that I'd perceived at home in Lancashire. That wasn't the only reason. But it was a big bonus." At St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, where he studied English under F. R. Leavis, the astonishing thing, McKellen said, "was to meet other boys as dotty about theatre as I was. I wasn't the odd one out."

In fact, Cambridge, when McKellen arrived there, in 1959, was a theatrical powerhouse. He met and worked with numerous people who went on to become significant players in British culture: the performers Peter Cook, Derek Jacobi, Corin Redgrave, and David Frost, and the directors John Tydeman, later the influential head of BBC radio drama; John Barton, the Shakespearean director and éminence grise; Richard Cottrell, a director at the Bristol Old Vic and the Prospect Theatre, which gave McKellen his big break, as Richard II, in 1968; and, especially, Trevor Nunn, who became, at twenty-eight, the head of the R.S.C. "I'd heard that there were many remarkable people around Cambridge, but really the genius actor was a guy called Ian McKellen," Nunn said, recalling his first sighting of his fellow-student. "I had imagined somebody who looked like a young Charles Laughton. I was imagining extraordinariness. The figure in the duffel coat seemed to be an affable, perfectly ordinary Cambridge student. I said to the person who pointed him out to me, 'Are you sure that's the guy with the big reputation?' "

"My acting at the time was all about disguise," McKellen said. "Makeup was very important. Wigs. Funny walks." His "thunderclap" moment, as he calls it, came in his first year, when the prestigious Marlowe Society was putting on both parts of "Henry IV." In true amateur spirit, the Marlowe Society refused to list the names of the players in its program. Still, McKellen's Justice Shallow was singled out by Alan Dent in his review in the *News Chronicle*, a national paper:

> Infinitely the best performance, though, is that of Justice Shallow who is genuinely ancient, wheezy, full of sudden changes and chortles and sadnesses. . . . The young actor not only plays the mad old gentleman quite brilliantly—he also shows himself to be a master of make-up, which is the rarest thing in amateurs. . . . One would like to know the name of this Shallow because it might obviously become a name to remember.

"It was like being told you were beautiful when you'd always thought you had big ears," McKellen said in a 1976 interview. At the theatre on the day of the review, he spotted Richard Cottrell, who stammered, "Got an agent yet?" "I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'Well, after that review . . .' I thought if Richard Cottrell and Alan Dent think I'm a good actor, why *shouldn't* I become a professional actor? From then on, I stopped playing old men and played juveniles, because I knew that's what I'd have to do. They're the difficult parts, because you can't disguise. You're coming on as yourself. I started training myself to be fit to be a professional," he told me.

Looking back on his Cambridge career, McKellen now regrets his haphazard studies ("I did no work") and the exclusivity of his sexual orientation ("That I didn't have an affair with a woman seems to me ridiculous. It's probably not going to happen now," he said). Nonetheless, for him, gay life at the university had a special importance. "It was something I knew about but other people didn't," he said. "That's the odd thing, people will tell you—in the days when the closet was the norm, it was quite fun, working out whether somebody was gay or not." In his first job in repertory, McKellen had photographs made up that he autographed and handed out to the girls who waited at the backstage door. "I don't know that it ever occurred to me that I would be famous," he said.

When he's in Stratford, McKellen lives just across the street from the Avon, in a house that is strategically equidistant from the R.S.C.'s Courtyard Theatre, its main stage, and the Dirty Duck pub: a whole world that measures about a hundred yards. He had invited me over for lunch before a Friday-evening performance of "The Seagull." A light rain was falling when I approached the house. As I rang the bell, I noticed a small note, on McKellen's embossed pink letterhead, stuck inside the knocker:

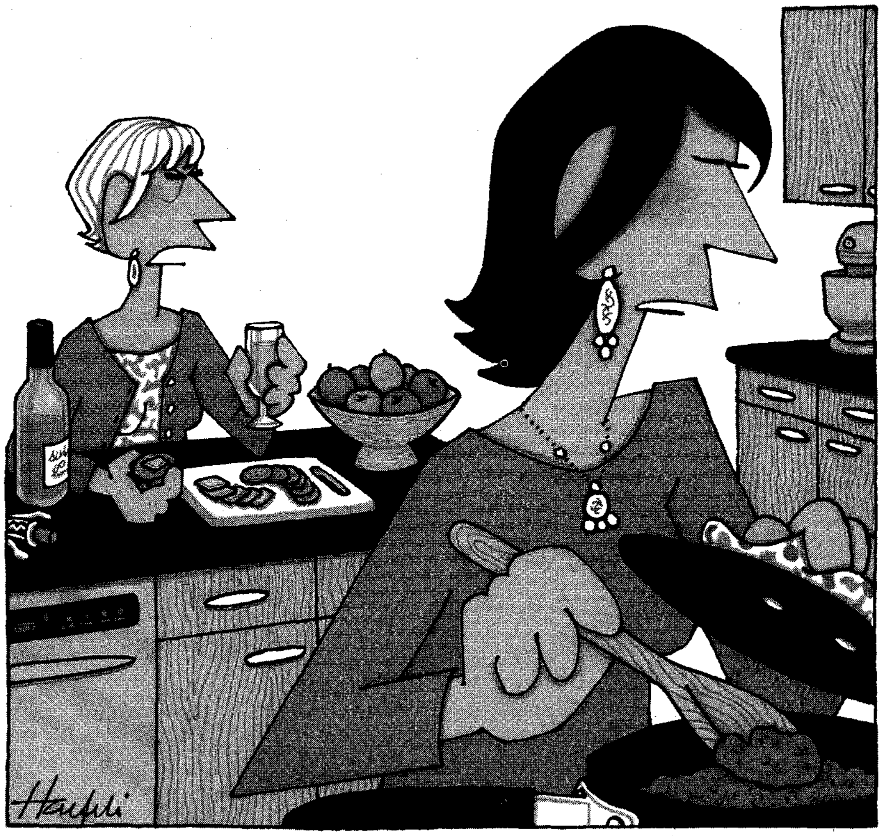
> John L—Please come to the stage door of the Courtyard Theatre now. . . . I am having to work but Trevor Nunn is happy for you to watch.

That afternoon, the understudies for "The Seagull" were having their only run-through of the play in front of an invited audience, but McKellen's own understudy had fallen ill. So, with another performance to deliver in just five hours, McKellen was standing in for his stand-in. Most stars, it goes without saying, don't do this. McKellen, however, who co-founded the Actors' Company (1972-74) and headed a company at the Royal National Theatre, is a passionate believer in the ensemble principle. "The friendship, the interdependence, the shared everything," he said as he took me backstage to his dressing room between scenes. "The company becomes your family."

A helium balloon was tied to the spigot of McKellen's dressing-room sink, in honor of his birthday, the previous day. Four bare light bulbs surrounded his mirror. In the top left corner of the mirror was a card that said "O Romeo, Romeo! Where the Fuck Art Thou, Romeo?" A dog-eared copy of the "King Lear" script lay beside McKellen's laptop; on the first page he had scrawled "Omnipotent, Dictator, God." McKellen, noticing my eyes drift over to the script, said, "I've only begun to get a grip on it after thirty performances. Every speech, every word can be mined. It's so rich, so fraught; it makes such sense."As he talked about finding his way to the character of Lear, his conversation became a kind of play-by-play of his investigative method. "Initially, in rehearsal, I was going, 'Is he a warrior king? Is he a priest king? He's eighty—do I have to be old?' " he said. " 'Do I have to walk old? Do I have to sound old? Is he ill? He's got this heart condition, has he?' Then I sort of let all that go and said, 'Let's just concentrate on what he's actually saying.' It's his mind that's declining but being woken, and there are explosions happening. There's a storm in his mind."

McKellen's obsessive focus makes him a dangerous actor. "He likes the smell of napalm in the morning," the director Sir Richard Eyre said. He has a habit of inventing virtuoso challenges for his characters. While playing Richard III, for instance, with a withered arm, he stripped off his uniform to present himself bare-chested to Lady Anne. "In the soliloquy afterward, one-handed he had to dress himself, do all his buttons up, plus a clasp, take a cigarette out of his case and light it, and appear the perfect military man by the end," Eyre, who directed the 1990 Royal National Theatre production, said. "It was the apotheosis of technical virtuosity married to character." In Martin Sherman's "Bent" (1979), a play about the treatment of homosexuals in Nazi Germany, McKellen's character was forced by S.S. guards to beat his boyfriend to death and have sex with a dead girl to "prove" that he wasn't homosexual. "He did something that was phenomenal," Sherman said of McKellen's interpretation. "He was sitting there, and he defecated. It was very subtle—but you saw in his body the spasm, which is what a person does in a period of such shock. It was one of the most stunning things I've ever seen." Sherman continued, "After a month, he didn't do it any longer, because he was on to something else in the scene that he thought made it even more honest."

Of the great modern classical actors with whom he is often associated—Gielgud, Paul Scofield, Sir Laurence Olivier—McKellen is the preëminent figure to emerge from the universities. The others studied at acting schools; McKellen taught himself. "The thing I'm most proud of as an actor is having learned how to get a laugh," he said. "I'm not a naturally funny person. I'm not a good raconteur." His approach to a part is forensic. "Ian loves the smell of



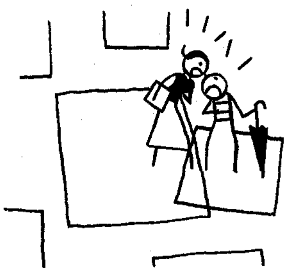
"Are you going to trust your father's selective memory over mine?"

the greasepaint and the roar of the crowd, but he's absolutely at his happiest when he can bring to bear his academic side," Nunn said. "He loves disagreeing with scholars' notes." In his pursuit of meaning, McKellen is ruthless with himself and, according to Eyre, sometimes with others. "Meaning is everything to him," Eyre said. "He's fantastically intolerant of other actors if they just come on and generalize. I've seen him actually shake an actor to try and get the actor to be specific. I can think of one production in which he was so irritated by the inadequacies of an actor that he would physically move him across the stage. I thought, There could be an incident. . . . Sometimes he'll drive you absolutely crazy because he'll interrogate a comma; he'll interrogate an 'and.' The hardest thing for him to curb is his instinct to draw all the energy of the event to himself."

Self-aggrandizement seems to have been at issue between McKellen and Helen Mirren when they teamed up on Broadway, in 2001, to play the warring husband and wife in Strindberg's "Dance of Death." "That was tricky," Sean Mathias, who directed the production, and who lived with McKellen from 1978 to 1987, said. "Mirren doesn't like to do too much working it out—it sort of kills it for her. She didn't enjoy the method. I think she found him self-serving." Some actresses have complained that McKellen can retreat behind technique, so that the focus of a scene becomes more about his performance than about the relationship between the characters—the characterization is theatrical but curiously unlived. These days, when McKellen looks back on his early performances, he says, "It's Ian McKellen running alongside the character, commenting as they go arm in arm. 'Get this!' 'Got it?' Being the messenger. Now I'm the message. The character I now start with is me. The one quality I've got now—I suppose I've been working toward it all my life—is confidence. No greater gift to be given to an actor."

McKellen's tendency to illustrate his characters rather than live them was, he said, "why people came to see me and thought, That man can never work in front of a camera." In the 1982 film "Walter," directed by Stephen Frears, which inaugurated Britain's Channel 4 Television and is available on DVD as "Loving Walter," McKellen, playing a dim, discombobulated, and abandoned soul struggling with a mental handicap he can barely understand, delivered an extraordinary characterization. Nonetheless, he was frustrated by his inability to build a sustained screen career. After playing the philandering John Profumo in "Scandal" (1989), he seemed to relinquish his dream of film success. "It's slightly a mystery as to why bigger film roles haven't come my way," he told a reporter that year. "But now I've been left behind." He decided to make his own luck by producing and co-writing the film version of "Richard III," which was released in 1995. The challenge paid off. McKellen proved that he could carry a film; more important, he was increasingly able to relax in front of the camera. What McKellen couldn't ignore before this point, he said, "was that behind the camera was not only the director and cameraman but everybody else looking at you." While working on Bill Condon's "Gods and Monsters" (1998)—McKellen played the cult gay horror director James Whale, a performance that earned him the first of two Academy Award nominations (the second was for the first "Lord of the Rings" release)—he said, "I felt very happy with the character and it was easy for me to do. I suddenly realized that all those people round there, they're not critics, they're not the audience. There's only one audience, and that's the camera."

While McKellen was onstage, I noticed Lear's curse on Cordelia, typed out and tucked into the far corner of the mirror in his dressing room. It ended, "Here I disclaim my paternal care, propinquity and property of blood, and as a stranger to my heart and me hold them from this forever." When he returned, I asked him why he'd put up that particular quotation. "I'm sure it's to do with having this dreadful unexpressed secret," he said. "Dodging around the central fact, not totally committing."



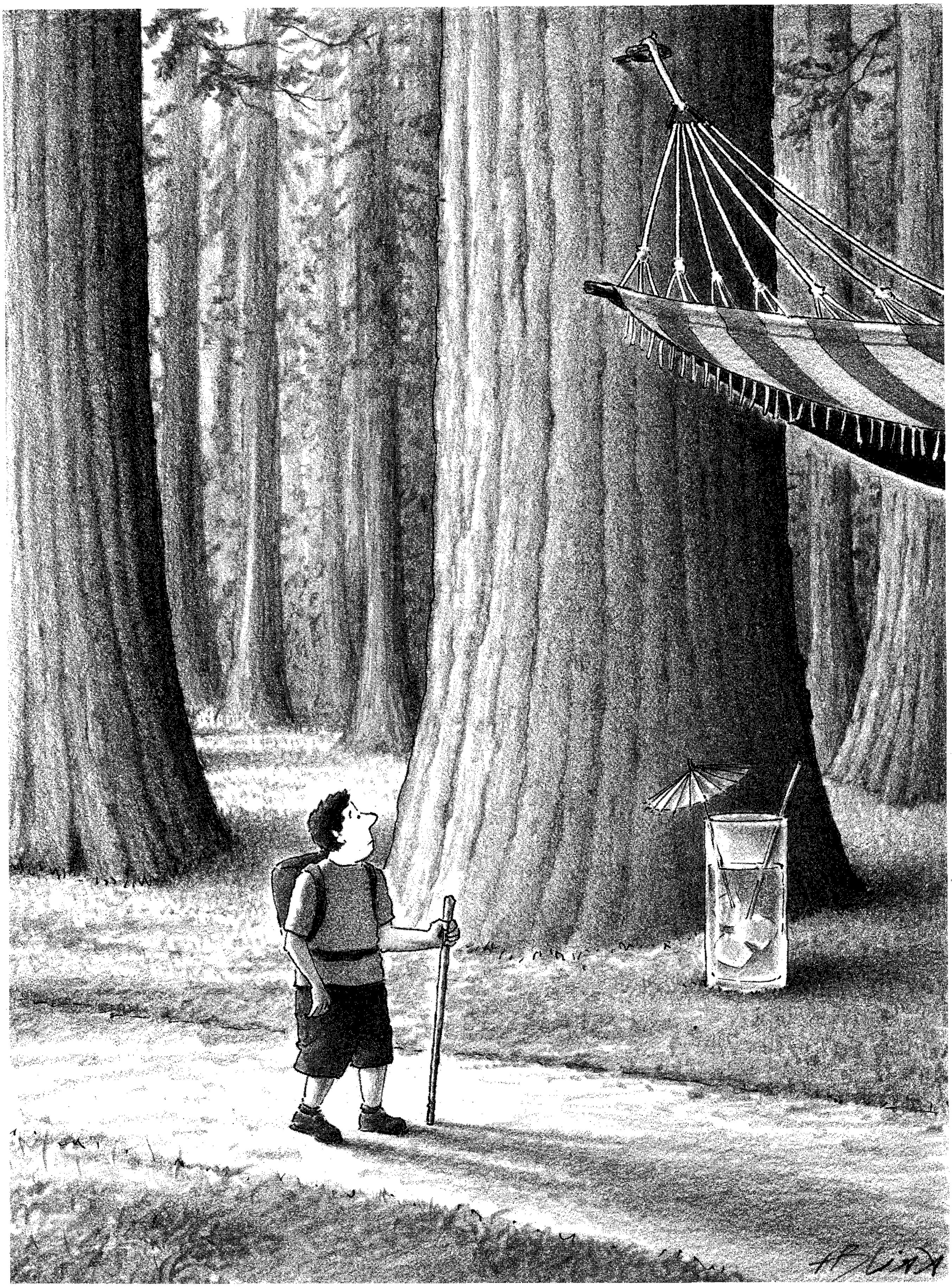
McKellen was a kind of stranger to his own heart until he went public with his sexual orientation, in 1988. The year before, he had toured in the United States. One night in San Francisco, he met up with his close friend Armistead Maupin, the popular American chronicler of gay life, whom McKellen calls "my godfather," and his then partner, Terry Anderson, who pointed out, McKellen later said, that there were almost no famous actors in the United States or Britain who were out. "Do you think I should come out?" McKellen asked. "I can see them now, looking at each other and thinking, Whoa!" he said.

At the time, McKellen's anxiety was about his career. A few years before, at the instigation of Harold Pinter, he had met with the producer Sam Spiegel, at Spiegel's house, to discuss the possibility of his starring in the film version of Pinter's "Betrayal," an examination of heterosexual infidelity. "We chatted," McKellen said. "I was shortly going off to do 'Amadeus.' He said, 'You're going to America?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Will you be taking your wife?' I don't know why I said, 'Well, I'm not married. I'm gay.' 'Oh,' he said. 'Look at the time. Lovely to meet you.' I was out of the house like that." McKellen snapped his fingers. "I had never come out to somebody before."

When he did come out publicly, he did so dramatically. In January, 1988, on a BBC radio show about the infamous Clause 28—legislation that aimed to prohibit local authorities from publishing material condoning homosexuality or from referring to it in state schools as an acceptable life style—McKellen took part in a discussion with the right-wing columnist Peregrine Worsthorne, who kept referring to gays as "them." "Let's not talk in the abstract," McKellen said finally. "Let's not talk about *them*. Let's talk about *me*."

On the cover of *Gay Times*, three months later, he beamed and brandished his right fist under the headline "MAKING A STAND: IAN McKELLEN—OUT OF THE CLOSET AND FIGHTING." Lobbying against Clause 28, McKellen used his connections to buttonhole pol-

SKETCHBOOK BY HARRY BLISS

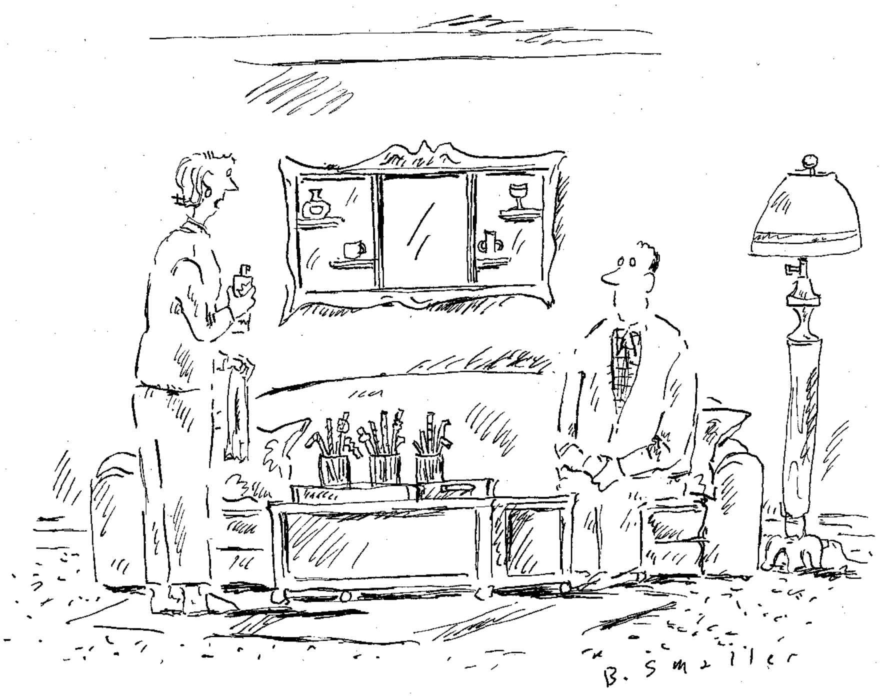


iticians, including one of Britain's most fervid anti-gay spokesmen, Michael Howard, who was later the Conservative Party leader. After a fruitless meeting, Howard requested an autograph for his children. McKellen obliged. "Fuck off! I'm gay," he wrote. To this day, if McKellen finds himself in a hotel with a Bible in the bedside table, he turns to Leviticus 20:13 ("Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination") and tears out the page. "It's the one thing I find difficult to defend but do go on doing," he said.

McKellen's knighthood, conferred in 1991, proved "a wonderful gift." It arrived, he said, "just at the right moment, not to boost my own self-confidence but to boost the confidence of a group of people who were trying to change the laws." The activists failed to prevent the passage of Clause 28 (which was later repealed by New Labour), and their battles with the establishment led to the realization that they needed a permanent, professional lobby. McKellen played a central role in the formation of the resulting organization, which is called Stonewall. His visibility was not welcomed by all gay activists. The filmmaker Derek Jarman, calling McKellen "Sir Thespian Knight," mocked his late arrival to the cause and Stonewall's intention to negotiate with what Jarman perceived as the enemy. But, less than twenty years after Stonewall was founded, McKellen could point to its astonishing achievements: gays in the military, an equal age of consent for homosexuals and heterosexuals, civil partnership. "Stonewall was created in this room, just at the end of that dining table," he told me when we talked in his London kitchen. "There'll be a blue plaque out there one day."

In a sense, McKellen sees Lear as the theatrical apotheosis of his hard-won authenticity. The part requires an actor to tap into an enormous range of feeling. "You're giving the audience some of your spirit through the character," he said during a break. "You must just allow that to happen. You have to be brave. You have to be daring. You have to be modest as well. That's all to do with temperament, not to do with technique at all. I am able now to do it because I came out when I was forty-nine. There was nothing about myself anymore that I couldn't share. That's when I discovered I could cry onstage."

He noticed me looking at a printout of a *Guardian* article by Germaine Greer that lay on top of a pile of books. "SO IAN McKELLEN DROPS HIS TROUSERS TO PLAY KING LEAR. THAT SUMS UP THE RSC'S WHOLE APPROACH," the headline said. Greer's harangue—she didn't like the old people or the teen-agers or the foreigners in the audience, Stratford's hotel accommodation, the set, the actors' elocution, and that was just the beginning—had been written more than three weeks before the press opening, while the show was still being fine-tuned. (Greer had bought a ticket and transgressed the journalistic embargo.) McKellen said that he found the piece "deeply hurtful"; nonetheless, he'd sifted through it for "anything that I can understand how to put right—not in her terms but in my own." Greer had taken McKellen to task for the doddery shaking of his hands: "McKellen displays his usual astonishing repertoire of gesture and movement; he begins with hand tremors . . . proceeds to spastic arms and rubbery hands, totters and teeters, grunts, gapes and squints, until he is as irritating as any fractious, befuddled, sclerotic old bugger you've ever met." "She was sort of right," he said. "I was discovering how to work in this alien theatre, and I wanted everybody to see—a theatrical gesture for a theatrical space. It's very difficult to act for someone close and someone a long way away. So I have amended the wobbly hand." He added, "I don't take it as the last word on what we're up to." The intercom announced McKellen's approaching cue for Act IV. With a cavalier flourish, he tossed the pages onto his dressing table and went back to work.



"Just because you collect them doesn't make them collectibles."

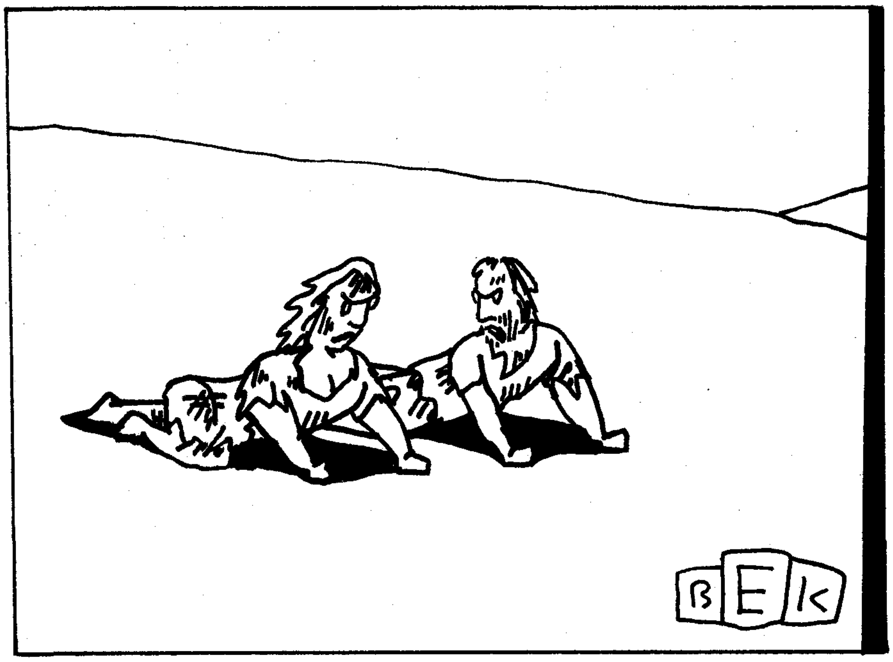
After the performance, as he returned to the dressing room, a deep, plummy voice boomed over the intercom. "Tremendous, tremendous," Nunn was saying. "I was particularly caught by the understudy for Soren, who, when he finally is able to learn the text, I think he's going to give the real Soren a run for his money."

The next day, with a matinée of "The Seagull" and an evening performance of "King Lear"—seven hours of performing—ahead of him, McKellen was back in his dressing room, ready to chat right up to his first entrance; he seemed to require no special psychic preparation for assuming a character. "I get myself into a little routine, which involves getting the hair right and putting on a little makeup," he said. "That will be the moment when I step over the line into the play." When he had finished donning his costume as Soren, he put his face close to the mirror and scrutinized himself. "There he is!" he said, seeing the character in his reflection.

"Slightly watery eyes, I think he has. I do a yawn before I go on, and they water a bit." It was show time.

That Sunday, there was a reunion for the drama club at McKellen's former grammar school, the Bolton School, which he had attended on scholarship. It was held at noon in the wood-beamed, low-ceilinged Scholars Room of the Falcon, an Elizabethan hostelry, about a five-minute walk from the Courtyard Theatre. For many of the assembled Old Boys, this was the first group gathering since they had appeared together fifty years earlier in "Henry V," McKellen's last school play. Graham Chesters, the self-appointed class historian, had brought along school programs and photos, which he set out on a table. "That's myself and Ian in 'Henry V,' " he said. He pointed to a program from Athletics Sports Day, 1953, when McKellen had come third in the high jump. "He was renowned for having no sporting interests. But there it is in print," Chesters said. He also showed off some programs for Speech Day declamations—with the young I. M. McKellen, in various years, reading Tennyson's "The Lotus-Eaters," Keats's "Hyperion," and Bridges's "The Winnowers."

McKellen is by no means the only Boltonian to have distinguished himself in the world. Among those gathering on the day were John Boulter, who ran twice in the Olympics; David Hargreaves, a retired professor of education at Cambridge; the historian Norman Davies, who wrote "Europe: A History"; and Sir Harry Kroto, who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, in 1996. McKellen arrived formally dressed, in a gray suit with a flowered blue shirt and black shoes. He was immediately surrounded by his friends. Although he had requested that he not be the focus of the afternoon, inevitably he was seated at the center of the horseshoe-shaped table. When it was his turn to speak, he reminded the assembled of "the wonderful time we had at Stratford camp." For a week, every summer in the mid-fifties, with a couple of the Bolton masters as chaperons, a bunch of student theatre fanatics had camped in tents upriver at Tiddington and spent their waking hours in Stratford going to plays. At night, around the campfire, the teachers and students had dissected the performances. "I learned for the first time that it was possible to go to the theatre and have an opinion about what you saw," McKellen said. (His critical faculties were already sharp enough at the time for him to be dissatisfied with Paul Robeson's Othello.)



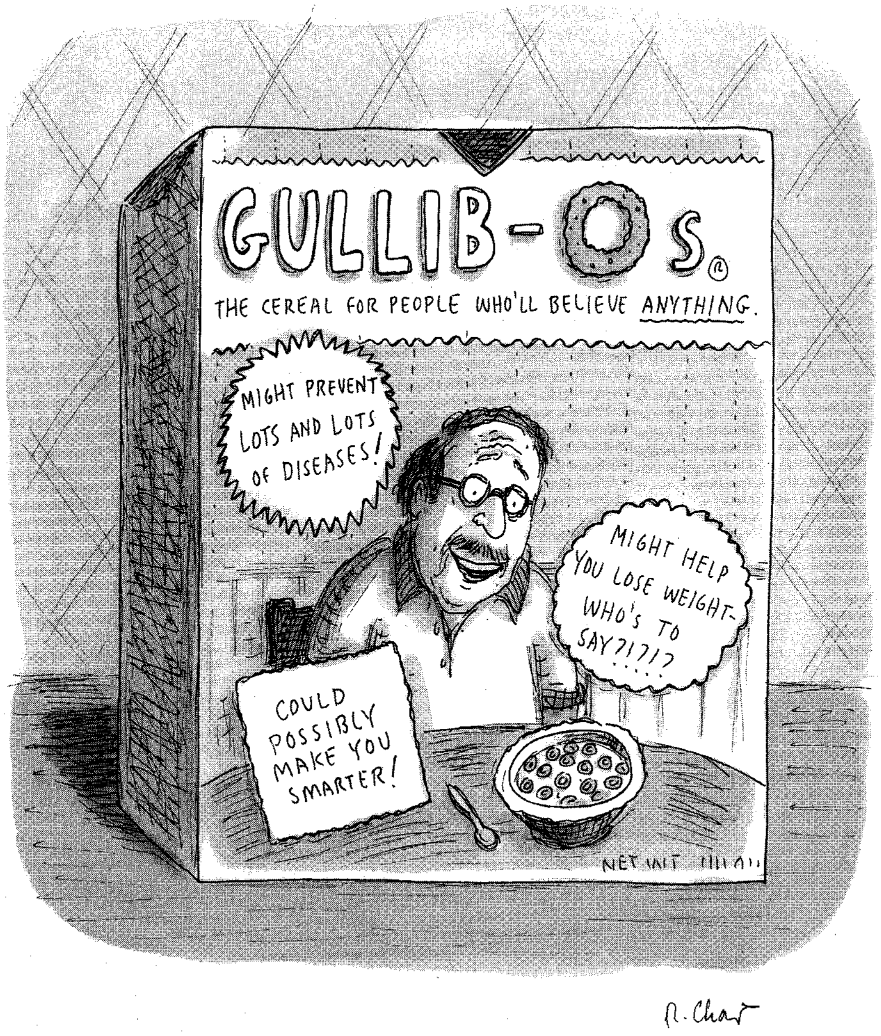
"Why isn't it O.K. for us to have different mirages?"

• •

Surveying the jolly, confident Old Boys with whom he'd shared an important part of his life, McKellen told me, "We were probably all on scholarships. Those of us who went to university, we didn't pay a penny. It just reminds me of my roots. The sap is still coming up from the roots." McKellen sees himself as one of those vagabond players "who simply don't have anything to keep them at home"; nonetheless, his sense of home is always with him. He can wander far afield so securely precisely because he knows where he's from. One speech had mentioned, as proof of McKellen's international popularity, that his image, in its "Lord of the Rings" incarnation, was on a New Zealand stamp. McKellen pointed out that he had asked specifically that his likeness be used for international postage. "It's not the stamp that's used the most," he said. "It's the stamp that travels the most."

I saw McKellen for the last time, in Newcastle, on a bright day in July, by which point he'd played Lear about fifty times and collected glowing reviews. At noon, the autograph hounds were already gathered outside the stage door. Before taking off for Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and New York, the R.S.C. tour had brought McKellen back to one of his favorite British stages, the Theatre Royal, an imposing twelve-hundred-seat theatre at the top of Grey Street. Today's matinée was "King Lear"; all twelve hundred seats had sold, so McKellen arranged to wedge me in on one side of the stage between the lights and the sound system. "You're tucked away in the box," he said. "You'll have the time of your life, just peeping over."

Then he excused himself for ten minutes in order to do his voice exercises. (Instructions were printed out on his dressing table: "Blow the cheeks up and use the fingers to pop them," "Purse the lips like a goldfish, then smile," "Balance a pencil on the upper lip, making sure the breath is coming from the center.") When he returned, he explained why he needed them. "The danger is when you're playing a very tense part that you get angry and your neck starts getting tense, which impedes the voice," he said. "I'm constantly getting too tense up here." He touched the back of his neck. McKellen counts as his "career low" a night in the mid-eighties when he lost his voice while performing "Acting Shakespeare," his one-man show, at the Royal National


GULLIB-Os®
THE CEREAL FOR PEOPLE WHO'LL BELIEVE ANYTHING.
MIGHT PREVENT LOTS AND LOTS OF DISEASES!
MIGHT HELP YOU LOSE WEIGHT— WHO'S TO SAY?!?!?
COULD POSSIBLY MAKE YOU SMARTER!
NET WT

Theatre, for an AIDS charity. He had just done his gruffest tones for Falstaff, and, when he segued into a monologue from "Romeo and Juliet," his voice disappeared. "Full house. No mic. I whispered, 'I'm sorry, I have no voice.' Big laugh. They thought it was part of the show," he said. Instead of leaving the stage to compose himself, he lay down in front of the audience. "I kept thinking the voice would return while I whispered for help from the audience. John Mills handed up a lozenge from his wife's handbag," he told me. "I said, 'You'll just have to excuse me.' I lay on my back and did some voice exercises." After about fifteen minutes, he had recovered enough to continue.

For Lear, McKellen had taken to heart a note from Jonathan Hyde, the actor playing the Earl of Kent, who had suggested, for the storm scene, "maybe a little more feeling and a little less noise." "I've increasingly tried to get out of the way of the words," McKellen said. "Stop telling the audience what you feel. You have to feel it yourself, but you don't have to express it. That's what I'm constantly trying to do: fight against my own tendency"—here he boomed—"to Give Them a Show!" Before I took up my position at the side of the stage, I asked him what he told himself before going on. " 'Let it happen,' " he said. " 'Listen to the actors. It's because they've spoken that I speak.' I want to thrill them with Shakespeare, not with me." He looked up at me. "There is a difference," he said.

From his first entrance, McKellen delivered on his promise. When, during the ceremonial divesting of Lear's kingdom, he reached the doom-laden line "while we unburthen'd crawl toward death," he threw it away with an inspired self-mocking chuckle. Later, enraged by Cordelia's refusal to match her sisters' encomiums, he held up the coronet that was to have been Cordelia's crown, turning it on its side so that it formed a large zero, then shouted through it to Cordelia, "Nothing will come of nothing: Speak again." On this bedrock of nuanced choices, moment by moment, McKellen made the poetry and the character of Lear both vivid and exquisite.

Backstage, already changed into jeans and a red Nelson Mandela T-shirt, McKellen greeted Armistead Maupin and his husband, Christopher Turner. (Maupin had arranged to give a reading in Newcastle that night, so as to catch McKellen's performance.) McKellen gave them the news that the previous week the Bishop of Carlisle had attributed the summer floods—it was the rainiest June on British record—to "our moral degradation," and in particular to Britain's acceptance of gay life styles. "This is God's revenge," McKellen said. "I just thought you should know that."

Later, after the reading, McKellen and I went to a restaurant, where we waited for Maupin and Turner to join us. Our talk led to a discussion of McKellen's former relationship with Sean Mathias, who figured "huge," he said, in his story. The pair had met at the Edinburgh Festival in 1978, when McKellen was thirty-nine and Mathias was twenty-two. "I was immediately taken," McKellen said. "He was quite eccentric, had his hair dyed bleached blond. He was in a play. He was more potential than achievement. I made him laugh." Mathias, who is Welsh, was smart, combustible, outgoing, and challenging. "We were a great couple. We would swagger out together and it was good. I loved his friends. He didn't much care for mine. He thought they were too stuffy," McKellen said. "Sean has been in my life since we met, without a break, even when we broke up. The first time I broke up with somebody, I didn't see him for fifteen years. When I broke up with Sean, we saw each other the next day, and the next day."

When Mathias first moved in with McKellen, he found McKellen's place "like a museum." He made him take down all the posters of himself. "I'm living with you, not your reputation," Mathias said, according to McKellen. Over the years, as an actor, a writer, and then as a director, however, Mathias benefitted from McKellen's artistic endorsement and collaboration. “It was exciting to see him growing in front of my eyes,” McKellen said. At the same time, Mathias wanted to move forward in the relationship—with a home, a family, and a life in which McKellen didn’t “always put himself first.” “He was constantly bickering and an irritant to me, not easy to handle,” McKellen said. “We had dreadful arguments. I don’t like getting angry. I don’t find getting angry in ‘King Lear’ easy.” In the mid-eighties, when McKellen weighed the offer to take his Royal National Theatre hit “Wild Honey” to America, the couple came to a tipping point. “If you go to America, I can’t come with you,” Mathias, who wanted to concentrate on his own career, told him. He went, and they broke up.

Maupin and Turner bustled in. The men’s noisy table talk, like their friendship, was a seamless blend of the personal and the political. They spoke about the need for old-age homes for gays and about Tony Blair’s bumpy exit from the British political arena. “Blair came and talked to Stonewall and said, ‘There are not many things that make you dance for joy in government, but when I saw the first gay people getting hitched I did a skip around Downing Street,’ ” McKellen said. He went on, “He won’t say, ‘Look, I did that,’ because it doesn’t look like the biggest feather in your cap. But, for a lot of people, it changed their lives.”

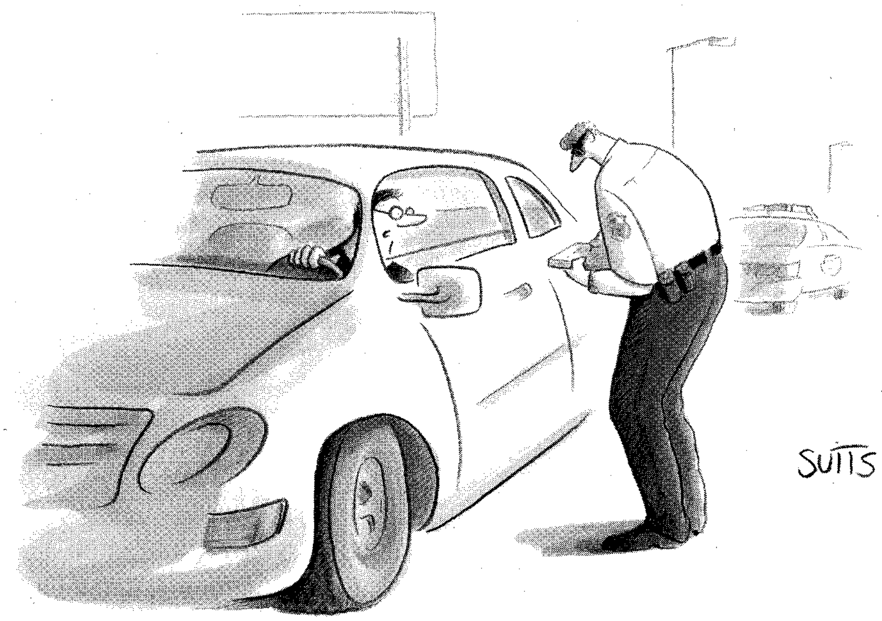
McKellen had arranged a postprandial shindig for his fellow-actors at the Northern Counties Club, up the street. With a panama hat at a raffish angle and a cigarette trailing white wisps into the steely night, he walked between Maupin and Turner, with his arms over their shoulders. Once inside the club, they quickly fell in among the raucous theatricals. Frances Barber, who was a termagant onstage as Goneril, was a kind of hilarious ring-tailed roarer off it. “I’m keeping a diary, but I don’t think I can publish it,” she said, as McKellen leaned against the wall, smiling. She proceeded to act out her version of McKellen and Nunn at work: “ ‘Trevor, I would like more thunder during that line.’ ‘I think, Ian, that it’s a half line, and you can do without thunder.’ ‘No, but, Trevor, I would like some thunder at—’ ‘Ian, Shakespeare was not a meteorologist.’ ‘We’re aware of that, Trevor, but I would like—’ ‘I’ve given you dogs. I’ve given you thunder. I have given you every sound effect that Shakespeare himself has told us to give you. I do feel I have done my duty. Please shut up and do the scene.’ ” Then, turning to nod in McKellen’s direction, Barber went on, “And he says to me, ‘He really is a fat-assed bastard!’ ” Barber sidled over to McKellen, and rested her head on his shoulder, like a little girl. “I’m showing off,” she said quietly.

An hour later, McKellen was cleaning up the debris of the night’s party, as Maupin spoke of travelling with him in New Zealand a few years ago and stopping to have their photograph taken under a poster for Frostee Boy Ice Cream. “The logo read ‘Often Licked, Never Beaten,’” Maupin said. “Ian tried to buy it.” He added, “He put the photo on his Web site. He’s fearless.”

Over the next month, there were intermittent e-mail bulletins from McKellen, charting his progress. In Singapore, where gay sex is punishable by up to ten years in prison, Lear was forced to wear underwear in the storm scene and McKellen spoke to the press protesting the community’s “personally offensive” anti-gay strictures. During a TV interview, he managed mischievously to mention that he was looking for gay bars. “When I found a couple,” he wrote, “I was greeted rapturously.” So, evidently, was the tour. “Singapore was a wow—full houses and standing ovations,” he wrote.

In all this legend of McKellen’s brilliance, however, where was the shadow? I’d asked Maupin when we met, but he had no answer. Even in private, McKellen buried his feelings in well-told anecdotes and fine form. “For the most part, it’s not his way to unload the contents of his heart,” Maupin said. “He saves that for the stage.” Then, in late July, Maupin called with a story that suggested that McKellen, for all his bravery and accomplishment, still feels in some way unacceptable to those who were closest to him. In May, 2006, Maupin and Turner were going up to the Lake District, and McKellen had hitched a ride to Grange-Over-Sands, where he was making fortnightly visits to his ninety-six-year-old stepmother, Gladys. As a teen-ager, McKellen had had a strained relationship with Gladys; in adulthood, he had grown devoted to her, the oldest witness to his life. Now senile, however, Gladys had become convinced that the only reason McKellen came to see her so often was that he was having an affair with her cleaning lady. “Ian spun it as a great source of laughs,” Maupin said. “He said, ‘She wasn’t even an attractive cleaning lady. She had an ass like the back-end of two lorries.’ ” McKellen tried repeatedly to disabuse Gladys of the notion, but she persisted. Finally, in frustration, he said, “Gladys, for heaven’s sake, I’m gay.”

“So they say,” she said. ♦



“To be frank, officer, my parents never set boundaries.”

ANNALS OF AGRICULTURE

SOWING FOR APOCALYPSE

The quest for a global seed bank.

BY JOHN SEABROOK

A cold drizzle was falling over St. Petersburg last March, and the gray morning light filtered through the grimy windows of the ceremonial rooms of the Vavilov Research Institute of Plant Industry, one of the oldest seed banks—and the most storied—in the world, situated on St. Isaac's Square. In one of the rooms, a woman in a smock sat at a table with a brown packet, and its contents, pea seeds, spilled out over the table in front of her. She did not look up from sorting through the seeds as two visitors passed, and, with her lips moving silently, she appeared to be lost in thought, or prayer.

Cary Fowler had an appointment to meet the director general of the Vavilov Institute, Nikolai Dzyubenko, in order to discuss the institute's seeds. Fowler, an American, is the world's seed banker. It's a nebulously defined position, yet a critical one. As the executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, which funds the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, in Norway, Fowler is engaged in the Noah-like task of gathering the seeds of about two million varieties of food plants—both the familiar domesticated crops and many of their wild relatives—in order to create the first global seed bank.

We tend to imagine apocalypse coming in the form of a bomb, an asteroid, or a tsunami, but should a catastrophe strike one of the world's major crops Fowler and his fellow seed bankers may be all that stand between us and widespread starvation. Any of the diseases currently active in the United States—the rust fungus attacking soybeans; the potato late blight (the same one that caused the Irish potato famine), which turns potatoes into a black mass of rot; the Western bean cutworm, which feeds on corn plants—has the potential to turn into a devastating nationwide scourge. Should that happen, the only remedy—genetic resistance—might lie in an obscure variety, stored in a seed bank.

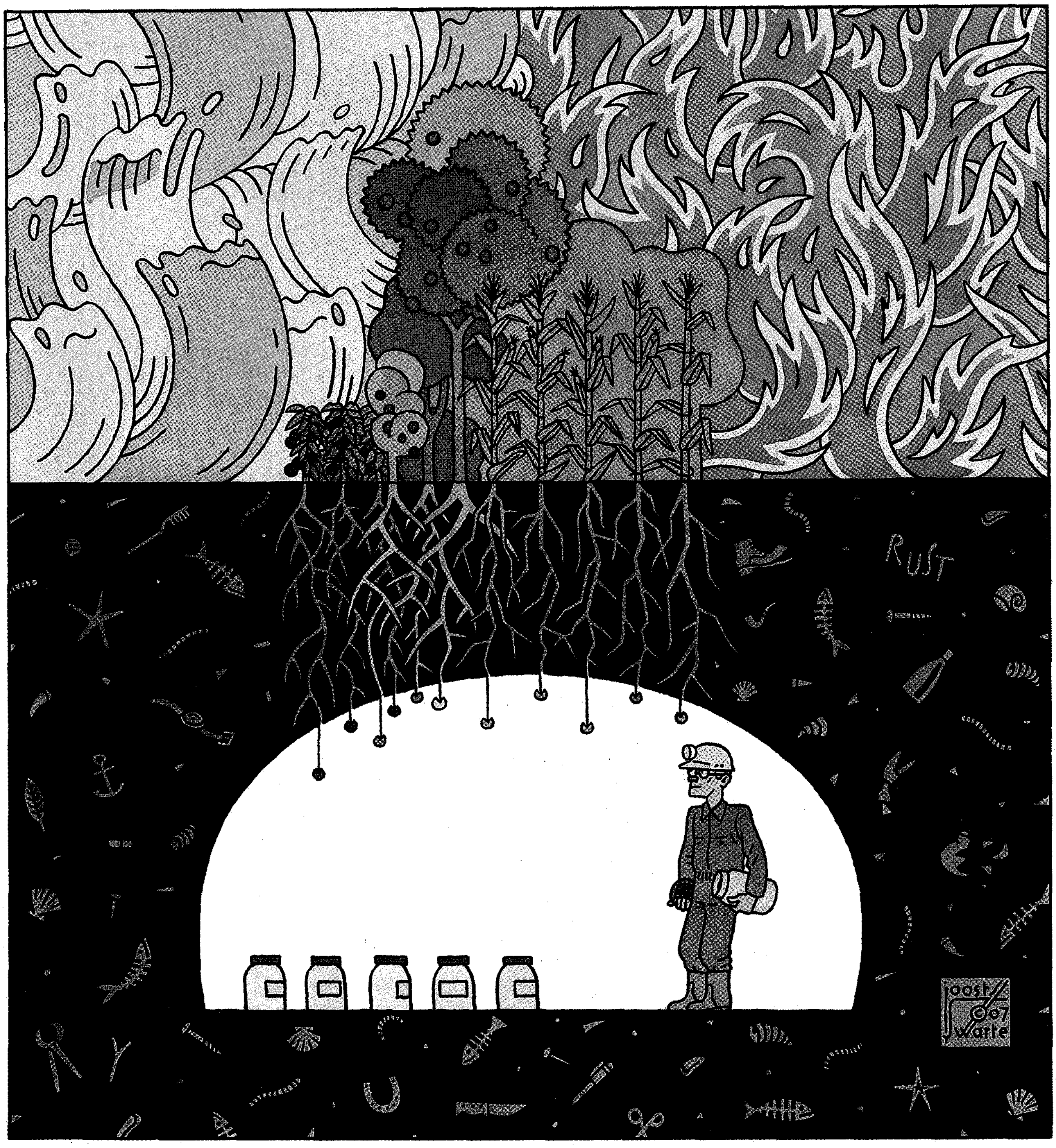
The Vavilov Institute is a monument to the extraordinary sacrifices people have made in order to save seeds. During the winter of 1941-42, when Hitler's troops were blockading Leningrad, cutting off food and supplies, the scientists who worked there protected the seeds stored inside the buildings, which amounted to several tons of nutritious food, from the starving Russians outside. At night, thousands of rats would invade the laboratories; the staff guarded the seed collections with metal rods. When some collections of potatoes needed resowing during the winter, institute workers found a plot outside Leningrad, near the front. Eventually, much of the collection was smuggled out over frozen Lake Ladoga, to a hiding place in the Ural Mountains. A. G. Stchukin, a specialist in peanuts, died of starvation in the building, as did D. S. Ivanov, a rice specialist, both surrounded by thousands of packets of seeds.

The story of what happened at the Vavilov Institute has a mythic resonance in the mind of every seed banker, and Fowler glanced around almost reverently as he walked through the shadowy halls. One of his personal heroes is Nikolai Vavilov, the Russian biologist and plant breeder for whom the institute is named—and the first man to dream of creating a world seed bank. For Fowler, coming here, to arrange for the institute to send seeds to the Svalbard vault, in time for its opening, in February, 2008, was, in a sense, finishing the job that Vavilov had started. And Vavilov himself was following in a tradition of seed saving that reaches back into prehistory.

Agriculture is thought to have begun around 8000 B.C., in the semi-arid mountains of Mesopotamia. Flint sickles and grinding stones discovered in the region suggest that the first farmers collected wild grains, which were developed over time into wheat and barley. Plants were also domesticated by other civilizations in other parts of the world, almost certainly independently. In Southeast Asia, farming began with the domestication of rice, around 6500 B.C.; in Mesoamerica, maize and squash were domesticated between 8000 and 5000 B.C. In each case, a legume was domesticated along with a grain or cereal: lentils with wheat in the Mediterranean; beans with maize in South America; soybeans with rice in Asia. Eating both together provided early humans with the right balance of protein and fat. Of the two hundred and fifty thousand known plant species in the world, only about two hundred are cultivated for food, and the vast majority of the world's food comes from just twenty crops, in eight plant families. It is a measure of the skill of the early farmers that almost all the plants we use in agriculture today were domesticated before historical times.

From the beginning, farmers must have realized that by saving a certain portion of the seeds from the previous year's crop they could insure themselves of a future harvest. (In Jarmo, Iraq, archeologists have found seed deposits that date from 6750 B.C.) Seed saving was one of the most important acts that a farming community performed. Seeds had to be protected from weather and animals—insects as well as mammals. One early method of preservation was to pack seeds and ash inside baskets, and then bury the baskets in the ground. Seeds were also sealed inside adobe structures, and kept in elevated thatched huts. When the community moved, it took its seeds along, too.

Biologically, a seed is an embryo of a plant. Around the embryo is usually a layer of endosperm, where the food for the embryo is stored, and around that is the seed coat, which protects the embryo until its moisture and heat sensors say that it is time to germinate. The embryo can survive for many years, under the right conditions, but not forever. In the



Cary Fowler is engaged in the Noah-like task of gathering the seeds of some two million varieties of food plants.

JOOST SWARTE

eighteen-nineties, when the tombs of the Egyptian pharaohs were being opened by archeologists, hucksters tried to promote what were said to be ancient Egyptian wheat seeds—the idea being that after such a long rest the seeds would be especially productive. But there's no evidence that any of these seeds germinated.

A seed is also a plant's legs. Wind and water spread seeds, as do birds, bears, foxes, and many other animals, but man has proved to be the longest-distance distributor. When Columbus arrived in the New World in 1493, on his second voyage, he brought the seeds of plants known only in the Old World, among them wheat, onions, citrus, melons, radishes, olives, grapes, and sugarcane, and he took away seeds of plants known only in the New World, including corn, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, pumpkins, squash, pineapples, and sweet potatoes. During the colonial period, the world's ecological boundaries were redrawn, as domesticated plants were carried far afield, and used to establish agricultural economies in other parts of the world. The Royal Botanic Gardens, at Kew, outside London, was the headquarters of Great Britain's botanical empire; from there, administrators coördinated the efforts of plant collectors at regional botanical stations from Jamaica to Fiji. As Lucile Brockway explains in her classic book "Science and Colonial Expansion," published in 1979, cash crops, taken

"I see you've done time, so working in a cubicle shouldn't be a problem."

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mostly from Latin America, where labor was scarce, were planted in Asia, where labor was abundant. The cinchona tree, from whose bark quinine is made, was transported from the Andes, and then planted in India by the British; the antimalarial treatment then enabled the colonization of Africa. The British also took natural rubber from Brazil, where the plant was first domesticated, and created a rubber industry in Southeast Asia that by the nineteen-twenties had greatly diminished Brazil's share of the rubber business. Sugarcane, which probably originated in India, went west, and became the main plantation crop of the West Indies. Coffee from Ethiopia was domesticated and introduced to India by the Arabs, and then cultivated by the Dutch in Java. Most of the coffee that grows in Latin America today traces its ancestry to a single coffee plant from Java that was taken to the Amsterdam Botanic Garden in 1706.

Before seeing Dzyubenko, Fowler was shown around some of the old rooms by a member of the institute, a tall, thin man with a long beard. Most of the exhibits concerned the life of Vavilov, who was born in 1887, the son of a prosperous Moscow merchant. Vavilov's education as a plant breeder coincided with the rediscovery, in 1900, of the work of Gregor Mendel, an Austrian monk who had died in 1884, and whose pea-breeding experiments were overlooked during his lifetime. Mendel established the fundamental laws of inheritance, and Vavilov, among others, was prescient enough to grasp their implications. Plant breeding, which had hitherto been an art, would now be a science. By crossing and backcrossing progeny with parents in order to isolate desirable qualities—higher yields, stronger roots, frost resistance—plant breeders could select traits from a broad spectrum of varieties, and combine them to create superior seeds. In order to realize the power of these new tools, however, breeders needed easy access to a large pool of genetic diversity. That was the quest to which Vavilov devoted his life. With the aim of creating hardier and higher-yielding Russian crops, Vavilov embarked on a series of expeditions to collect and catalogue ancient domesticated varieties (known as "landraces") of wheat, barley, peas, lentils, and other crops, as well as their wild relatives, reasoning that because they were well adapted to their natural environments they must contain valuable genes that could be incorporated into Russian crops. Over the next two decades, Vavilov himself collected more than sixty thousand samples, in sixty-four countries; altogether, his teams collected two hundred and fifty thousand samples. The present-day collection is based on those seeds.

Most people understand crop diversity in terms of choice—it's the difference between the sweet, creamy flavor of a Gala apple and the tart, crisp taste of a Granny Smith. But agricultural diversity is much more than that; it is a record of more than ten thousand years of human experience with crops, and of the struggle to produce food in changing ecosystems and climates. Crop diversity may be the most precious natural resource we have, because, as Stephen Smith, a research fellow at Pioneer Hi-Bred, one of the world's largest seed companies, has said, "How humans use diversity in farming determines our food, our health, and our economic well-being, and that in turn determines our political security." Crops such as corn and potatoes have been forced to adapt to vastly different climates in distant places: climate change has been a constant in the lives of crops for millennia. That is why seed banks, which are the primary repositories of crop diversity, are so important: the genes in them may represent our best hope for feeding ourselves in a warming world.

Vavilov observed that crop diversity is scattered unevenly around the world. There are certain places where it is abundant—Asia Minor for wheat and barley, the Andes for potatoes—and other places, such as Russia and the United States and Northern Europe, where there is very little. Vavilov eventually mapped eight centers of diversity, loosely grouped in a belt around the planet's middle. (Scientists speculate that the last Ice Age killed off diversity in much of the Northern Hemisphere, leaving a small center around the Mediterranean, where asparagus was first domesticated, and another in Eastern Europe, where barley and peas grew in abundance.) Building on the earlier work of a Swiss botanist named Alphonse de Candolle, Vavilov developed a theory that since diversity occurs over time, the centers of greatest diversity must also be the centers of origin for those crops. In 1926, he published "The Centers of Origin of Cultivated Plants." Vavilov's insight (which was subsequently qualified by other researchers) became the basis for national claims of sovereignty over seeds.

But war and politics prevented Vavilov from realizing his dream of a world seed bank. Like so many other Soviet scientists, he fell afoul of Stalin. Vavilov came from a wealthy family, was not a member of the Communist Party, and was friendly with Nikolai Bukharin, a rival of Stalin's. Furthermore, genetics was considered a form of "metaphysics," and geneticists the enemies of Bolshevism. Vavilov was arrested in 1940, charged with treason and espionage, and interrogated, sometimes under torture, for eleven months. His trial was held on July 9, 1941; the tribunal took only five minutes to find him guilty and sentence him to death by firing squad. Later, Vavilov's sentence was commuted to twenty years in a prison at Saratov, on the Volga River. There Vavilov died, of starvation, on January 23, 1943. He was buried in a common grave.

Fowler was familiar with these details of Vavilov's life, but he listened politely as his guide repeated them. Fowler is six feet tall, fifty-seven years old, with curly reddish hair, glasses, and a Southern accent and courtliness that derive from his upbringing, in Memphis, Tennessee. He had not removed his green parka—the rooms were chilly—and he carried a briefcase, which contained artists' renderings of what the Svalbard vault will look like. Dressed in a blue blazer, with a buttoned shirt collar hanging loosely around his neck, he looked like a schoolboy who had spruced up for a class photograph. His eyes are deep-set, and his prominent forehead sometimes makes it hard to discern whether they are open or shut. This morning, he looked very pale; he had told me earlier, as we left the hotel, that he thought he was coming down with the flu. But that wasn't going to keep him from his appointment with the director.

In addition to discussing the transfer of some of the institute's seeds, Fowler wanted to broach the delicate subject of what condition the seeds were in. As a seed bank, the Vavilov has been in long decline. "No one I know would claim to know what is really happening there," Fowler had written to me before the trip. "The most important question being, To what extent are the collections still alive? Certainly much has died. But how much? Some experts in particular crops claim that a lot still exists. But for other crops we know that the conditions of conservation/regeneration could only have led to large losses."

Nikolai Dzyubenko occupies Vavilov's former office, on the south side of the square. The wooden floors creaked and groaned loudly as we approached the room. Dzyubenko wore pink-tinted glasses, and his eyes were expressionless. He sat directly underneath a portrait of Vavilov, whose face was smiling, eager, and full of energy and optimism. The room looked both grand and tawdry; all the old elegance had floated up to the ceiling, like smoke, and clung to the elaborately painted plaster and the chandeliers. Fowler, gritting his teeth against his worsening flu, took out his papers and began to describe the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

"It's seventy-eight degrees north, very remote, and the town has an excellent infrastructure," he said. "There will be a big ceremony in February, for the opening, and we'd very much like to work with you on getting some of the Vavilov seeds sent there in time for that." A heavyset man, who was wearing a green sweatshirt that said "Australia" in yellow letters on the front, interpreted.

Dzyubenko answered that, technically, moving the seeds to Svalbard would not be difficult, "but since we are not independent, and since the Vavilov collection is a public treasure, this must be discussed with our superiors at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow—the decision cannot be made at this level. So it will take some time to discuss it." I glanced over at Fowler, to see if this prospect—waiting for the wheels of Russian bureaucracy to turn, before seeds from the institute could get to Svalbard—discouraged him at all. But he merely pressed his lips together, and nodded.

After their talk, Dzyubenko flung open the doors to the next room, to reveal a small feast of pastries, fruits, cold meats, cheeses, juice, and vodka that had been prepared in the American's honor. Fowler felt too queasy to eat any of it, though he did manage to touch the vodka to his lips for a toast. I thought that he would skip the tour of the storage facilities that the director had planned, but he insisted on going through with all of it, including a visit to a new cold-storage room. Another room, full of large stainless-steel liquid-nitrogen storage vats, looked impressive—until Fowler noticed that the digital readouts on all but one of the vats said "Error."

In the Bronze Age, when agriculture had become firmly established as a primary source of food, few calamities would have been as devastating to a community as the loss of its seed stores, or the destruction of its crops. But in our time we almost never hear about these kinds of catastrophes. During the United States-led invasion of Iraq, in March, 2003, the looting of Iraq's national archeological museum received considerable attention, but almost no one noted that the country's national seed bank was destroyed. The bank, in the town of Abu Ghraib, contained seeds of ancient varieties of wheat, lentils, chickpeas, and other crops that once grew in Mesopotamia. Fortunately, several Iraqi scientists had placed samples of the country's most important crops in a cardboard box and sent them to an international seed bank in Aleppo, Syria. There they sit, on a shelf in a cold room, waiting for a time when Iraq is stable enough to store them again.

Afghanistan's bank, which contained rare varieties of almonds and walnuts, and also fruits including grapes, melons, cherries, plums, apricots, peaches, and pears—many of which originated in the region—was destroyed in the 2001 overthrow of the Taliban. Scientists in Kabul had taken the extra precaution of hiding the national seeds in the basements of two houses in the towns of Ghazni and Jalalabad. But when they returned after the fall of the Taliban they discovered that looters had dumped the seeds on the floor. "Apparently, they were after the jars," Fowler told me. Those randomly scattered seeds represented dozens, perhaps hundreds, of unique varieties—Afghanistan's agricultural heritage.

Natural disasters can also destroy seed banks. Last year in the Philippines, a typhoon flooded a seed bank; there were reports of jars of seed floating in the ocean. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch demolished the national seed bank of Honduras. Nicaragua lost its national seed bank in the 1971 earthquake. Or banks can simply succumb to neglect.

Most of the fourteen hundred public and private seed banks in the world appear to be in a less precarious condition. There are national agriculture banks, which contain the seeds of crops grown in an individual country. There's also a network of international seed banks, funded by some sixty countries and organizations and managed by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, which store specific crops. The bank in Aleppo, where the Iraqi scientists sent their seeds, has one of the world's largest collections of wheat and barley seeds. The main rice seed bank is in Los Baños, the Philippines, and the maize bank is in Mexico City. There are also banks for wildflowers, trees, and wild species of plants. Some are "ex situ"—off-site—and others are "in situ," conserved in fields. The New England Wild Flower Society preserves North American native plants in "sanctuaries" throughout the Northeast. In 2000, the British Royal Botanic Gardens launched the ex-situ Millennium Seed Bank, an ambitious project (and a favorite of Prince Charles) that includes preserving all the native seed-bearing species growing in Great Britain. There is a movement to construct banks for disappearing breeds of domesticated animals; sperm and embryos are cryogenically preserved in liquid nitrogen, at a temperature of minus one hundred and ninety-six degrees Celsius. However, when it comes to the wild species of the world, animals as well as plants, our current preservation efforts are grossly inadequate. At the recent G-8 summit in Germany, in June, scientists predicted that as much as two-thirds of the world's wild species could be nearly extinct by 2100, because of habitat destruction, overfishing, and climate change. The resulting explosion of pests and the loss of pollinators would be only two of the devastating consequences for agriculture.

And even a well-run bank isn't an iron-clad guarantee against extinction. Most seed banks were created as short-term storage facilities in order to develop new seeds—something like genetic libraries. In the past thirty years, they have been modified to include long-term storage facilities, which preserve varieties that are no longer grown in fields—they're more like museums or zoos. Many gene banks aren't adequately equipped or funded for long-term storage. Fowler told me, "We think that fifty per cent of the unique collections in developing nations are in danger. Half. That's pretty stunning, when you think about it. As one scientist said to me, 'We call them seed banks, but actually they're more like morgues.' "

From the beginning of the United States' history, its people have been preoccupied with seeds. The early settlers faced a landscape largely devoid of domesticated crops, with the notable exception of maize, which Native Americans had brought from Central America. Among economic crops, only blueberries, cranberries, hops, and a type of sunflower originated in North America; a meal made exclusively of local ingredients would be meagre. Therefore it was necessary to import plants and seeds from other countries. Thomas Jefferson, who once wrote, "The greatest service which can be rendered to any country is to add a useful plant to its culture," smuggled rice seeds out of Italy by sewing them into the lining of his coat. Just as immigration brought cultural diversity to the United States, so the immigrants brought botanical diversity, in the seeds they carried with them, which were often concealed in the brims of their hats and the hems of their dresses. In 1862, in the midst of the Civil War, Congress, at the urging of Abraham Lincoln, established the Department of Agriculture, in order to collect "new and valuable seeds and plants . . . and to distribute them among agriculturalists." Great plant explorers like David Fairchild, who was Alexander Graham Bell's son-in-law, and Frank Meyer, for whom the Meyer lemon is named, introduced new crops to the United States, where they thrived.

By 1898, when the U.S.D.A. established the Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction, the government was distributing some twenty million seed packages a year to farmers. A network of state breeding stations helped develop the most productive varieties for each region. Beginning in the late nineteen-forties, the government established regional seed banks that focussed on individual crops: a center in Ames, Iowa, was devoted to maize; the apple and grape research station was in Geneva, New York; the potato center was established in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. In the nineteen-fifties, the government constructed a national seed bank—the Fort Knox of seeds—in Fort Collins, Colorado, the cornerstone of what is known today at the National Plant Germplasm System. The bank, which I visited in December of last year, holds nearly five hundred thousand kinds of seeds—its holdings include both varieties grown domestically and backups for other, international collections. It is a model for the Svalbard vault. The main storage vault is kept at eighteen degrees below zero Celsius: the ink in my pen froze as soon as I entered the room.

Fowler explained the basic principles of storing seeds in banks. When the seed comes in from the field, it is sorted, labelled, cleaned, and dried to a humidity level of about five per cent. Dryness and cold are the most important factors, to slow down the seed's metabolism, and to insure that it won't germinate. Breeders' collections are generally stored at room temperature or a little below and are intended to last for only a few years; base collections are kept at between minus ten and minus twenty degrees Celsius, a temperature at which some seeds can live for more than a hundred years. (Grains, such as wheat and barley, tend to live the longest.)

In any well-run bank, samples of the seeds have to be regularly germinated, to insure that the seeds are still viable. If the germination rate drops below a certain point, new plants must be grown in the field from the seed and new seeds collected from those plants. "It's not too complicated, but there's a lot of labor involved, and it's expensive," Fowler said. "Plus, there are equipment failures, poor management, funding cuts, natural disasters, civil strife—you name it."

Fowler's interest in agriculture began on his maternal grandmother's three-hundred-acre farm, near Madison, Tennessee, which he visited every summer as a boy. "There was cotton, corn, soybeans, chickens running in the back yard, a couple of milk cows—it was a real old-fashioned farm," he told me. "We'd go to the experimental plots at the local agricultural station for our seeds, and my grandmother would talk to everyone about the different varieties and make selections. She wanted me to take the farm over. She would always ask me, 'Do you want to be a farmer?' We spent a lot of time driving down dusty roads while she gave a running commentary on the quality of crops and soils, pointing things out. But I was more interested in the stuff I was studying in school—Sartre, freedom and determinism, the role of the individual in society, that kind of stuff. And I knew I wanted to be politically active, though I wasn't sure in what area."

During the school year, Fowler lived with his parents, in Memphis, where his father was a defense attorney and, later, a judge. He took an active part in civil-rights demonstrations, and was present in the church on the night that Martin Luther King made his last speech; King was assassinated in Memphis the next day. When he graduated from Simon Fraser University, in Canada, in 1971, he received conscientious-objector status, "which greatly upset my father, who had enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor," Fowler told me. After working in a hospital in North Carolina, as a clerk, for about a year, he was released from service, and planned to go to Sweden, to study for a Ph.D. in sociology at Uppsala University, forty miles north of Stockholm.

That year, however, Fowler discovered an oddly shaped mole on his stomach. By the time it was biopsied, the cancer had spread all over his body.

" 'Do you have life insurance?' the doctor asked me," Fowler recalled.

" 'No,' " I said. " 'Why?' "

" 'Because you have six months left to live.' "

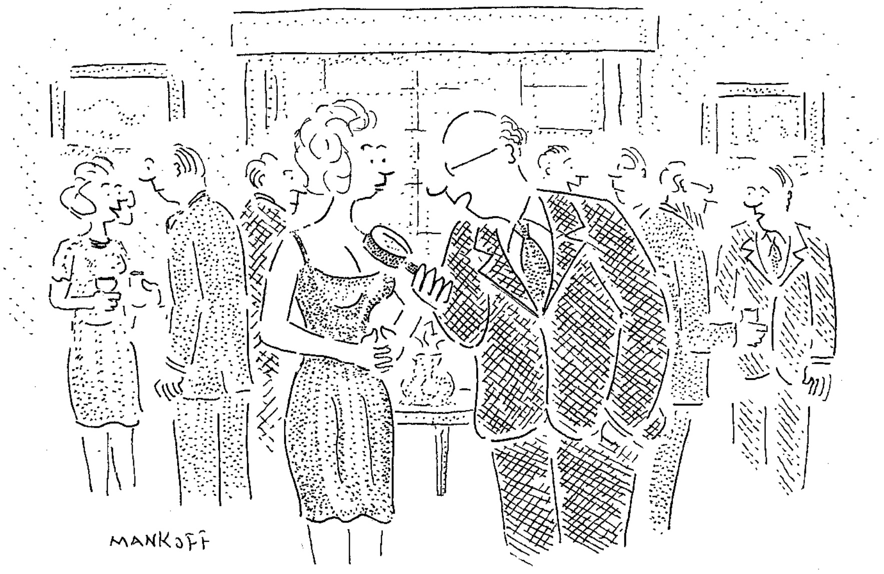
The doctors did what they could, removing part of his stomach where the melanoma had appeared, but the prognosis was still grim.

"So I went home and waited to die," Fowler said. "Every time I'd feel the slightest twinge in my body, I'd wonder, Is this the cancer? Is it starting? Am I going to die now?" But he didn't die, and after about a year he decided, "This is no way to live," and he went back to pursuing his sociology Ph.D. The doctors were so astounded that they sent Fowler to Memorial Sloan-Kettering, in New York, for a test of his immune system. Although it seemed to weaken when it was resisting the cancer, it became remarkably effective once the cancer started.

"Ten years later, I was given a diagnosis of testicular cancer," he said. He underwent a painful procedure that involved injecting dye into his feet and then circulating it through his lymphatic system; an X-ray would show how far the cancer had spread. "I lit up like a Christmas tree," Fowler said. "The cancer was everywhere. Though they didn't tell me at the time, they had never had a patient who had survived that kind of cancer." The doctors elected to do extensive radiation treatments; Fowler still has a map of tattoos all over his body that guided the radiation machine. Once again, Fowler told me, "The cancer just disappeared."

I asked how his cancers had influenced his work in saving seeds. Fowler replied, "The first one, I didn't handle it very gracefully. I was scared. Really

"Salted nuts or chewing gum?"



"Please excuse me—I'm a breast buff."

• •

scared. And the reason I was scared was that I hadn't done anything—I hadn't contributed constructively to society. And that was frightening."

Farmers began to turn away from the ancient practice of saving seeds early in the twentieth century. Plant breeders had discovered that, when two inbred lines are crossed with each other, the next generation explodes in "hybrid vigor," producing more robust plants than those which were allowed to pollinate randomly (known as "open pollination"). If the progeny of two pairs of inbred lines are themselves crossed (a "double cross"), their offspring will be even more vigorous. However, if those crosses and double crosses are then allowed to reproduce naturally, through open pollination, only a fraction of their progeny will show hybrid vigor.

Corn is among the easiest plants to hybridize, because the male parts, which are the tassels that contain the pollen, and the female parts, which are the ear and the silks, are widely separated. It is relatively simple, though labor-intensive, to cross two inbreds by sowing the two lines side by side in nearby rows, and removing male parts of the plants from one line, to insure that it is fertilized by the other. (This method of emasculating corn plants still provides summer employment to thousands of teen-agers throughout the Midwest.) American agriculturalists in general were slow to recognize the potential of hybrid corn, but several American breeders championed the new technique. One of them, Henry A. Wallace, happened to be the son of Warren Harding's Secretary of Agriculture, Henry C. Wallace, and his enthusiasm was heard in high places. In 1924, a Henry A. hybrid, which he dubbed Copper Cross, won a gold medal in the Corn Show at the Iowa Corn Yield Test. In 1926, Wallace founded the Hi-Bred Corn Company, later Pioneer Hi-Bred, to market his seeds.

Pioneer was by no means the first private seed company. A seed trade, catering to farmers who didn't want to take the time to clean and sort their seed, had existed since the early eighteen-hundreds. But farmers had only to buy the seed once, and then generate more seed themselves. With hybrids, however, farmers had to buy the seed every year if they wanted to enjoy the benefits of hybrid vigor. From a commercial point of view, plant breeders had hit the jackpot—a "biological patent" on seed. Pioneer reaped the benefits of this good fortune, and eventually became the dominant seed company in the world.

In 1933, hybrid corn amounted to about one half of one per cent of the planted corn acreage in the United States. By 1945, thanks in part to promotion by the U.S.D.A., that figure had risen to ninety per cent. Throughout the Depression, American farmers, who could have grown and saved their own seed by using traditional open-pollinated varieties, instead bought hybrid seed from corn companies; the increased yields justified the expense.

Beginning in the nineteen-forties, American-made hybrid seeds were sent around the world, as part of a vast agronomic program that came to be known as the green revolution. Norman Borlaug, an American plant breeder, used a strain of Japanese semi-dwarf wheat, known as Norin 10, which had been bred in Japan and brought to the United States in 1946, during the Allied occupation, to create a wheat with a stalk short enough to support a larger, more productive head. First in Mexico, and later in Pakistan and India, Borlaug's wheat allowed local farmers to double, and in some cases quadruple, their yields. In 1966, the International Rice Research Institute created a variety of stunted rice called IR8, a cross of an Indonesian type with a Chinese strain, which was widely planted in Asia.

The green revolution was a complicated blend of altruistic and imperial motives, played out through seeds. The notion that humans now had the power to banish the spectre of starvation and famine, which has haunted our species for millennia, was a potent one. The green revolution is estimated to have fed roughly a billion people who might otherwise have starved. In developing countries, production of cereals doubled. By the mid-eighties, the average person in these countries consumed twenty-five per cent more calories per day than in the early sixties. But the development and distribution of the superseeds, which was funded by the World Bank, the United States seed trade, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, was also a clever way of planting American-style agrarian capitalism in developing nations that might otherwise be in danger of succumbing to Communism. In Fowler's 1993 book "Shattering," written with Pat Mooney, a Canadian activist, he points out that the new hybrids "produced not just crops, but replicas of the agricultural systems that produced them. They came as a package deal and part of the package was a major change in traditional cultures, values, and power relationships both within villages and between them and the outside world." Now, instead of growing crops for local consumption, farmers began growing crops for export. And, like the American farmers before them, Mexican, African, and Asian farmers lost the incentive for saving seed.

In 1973, Fowler started working for a journal called *Southern Exposure*. "It was dedicated to improving the image of the South, and they were working on an issue about the disappearance of family farms," he said. "I got really involved in the subject. I had grown up in these two worlds, with a love of agriculture but with no sense of how that would fit in with what I was really interested in—politics, the law, social justice. Now I began to put things together." Two years later, he became a researcher for Frances Moore Lappé, who was writing a book called "Food First." Lappé was the author of "Diet for a Small Planet," which became a best-seller in 1971, promulgating the message that Americans could help solve world hunger by shifting to a predominantly vegetarian diet. But, with "Food First," Lappé wanted to analyze global food policy. Like many others, she was beginning to see that the aims of the green revolution weren't as simple as they appeared. Hunger was not only the result of a scarcity of food; it could also be caused by a production system that replaced traditional, sustainable agriculture, as practiced by peasant farmers, with a global export system that was driven by foreign agribusinesses. Lappé had rented a house in Hastings-on-Hudson, where Fowler spent a year, working with Lappé and her co-author, Joseph Collins.

In the course of his research, Fowler read Jack Harlan's articles on the loss of crop diversity, including "The Genetics of Disaster" and "Our Vanishing Crop Genetic Resources." Harlan, a professor of genetics at the University of Illinois, argued forcefully that the adoption of modern hybrid seeds around the world was causing the traditional varieties, grown by farmers for millennia, to become extinct. Landraces were, after all, thoroughly domesticated; if they weren't cultivated, they couldn't survive. In their place, the hybrids created monocultures. And, because hybrids are created by crossing purebred lines, these monocultures contained a narrower spectrum of genes. That meant that a single disease could wipe out much of the national crop. In the spring of 1970, a type of corn blight invaded cornfields in the Southern United States. By the end of the year, it had killed fifteen per cent of the American crop; some Southern states lost fifty per cent of their corn. In 1972, the National Academy of Sciences released a report on the genetic vulnerability of major crops, which found that seventy per cent of the United States corn crop consisted of just six varieties.

The very success of plant breeders' efforts was eliminating the raw material that made their work possible. In the United States, the nation's agricultural diversity, which had been rich in 1900, was vanishing from fields. A survey in 1983 found that, since 1903, the number of readily available varieties of cabbage dropped from five hundred and forty-four to twenty-eight; carrots dropped from two hundred and eighty-seven to twenty-one; cauliflower varieties fell from a hundred and fifty-eight to nine; and varieties of pears fell from twenty-six hundred and eighty-three to three hundred and twenty-six. In many cases, the new commercial hybrids that replaced the traditional varieties no longer tasted as good—they were bred more for production than for flavor.

Farmers, enjoying vastly greater yields with the new hybrids, couldn't be expected to go back to planting the traditional varieties. (The backlash to industrial monocultures did, however, help to inspire widespread interest in "heirloom" seeds, which began with the founding of the Seed Savers Exchange, in 1975, and also led to the creation of local farmers' markets where at least some of the old varieties can be found.) In the case of many landraces, the only alternative to extinction was preservation in the breeders' ex-situ storage centers—the seed banks. But most of these banks were short- or medium-term storage facilities, and even the long-term centers, like the national seed bank at Fort Collins, were at the time poorly funded and staffed, and hardly qualified to serve as the last line of defense against the mass extinction of landraces.

Fowler's undergraduate thesis had focussed on Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of human agency in politics, and he wanted to concentrate on the issue of genetic-resource preservation. In 1977, Fowler began working with Pat Mooney, who persuaded him to direct his political activism at the principal international venue within which food-policy matters are decided—the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, or F.A.O., which is based in Rome. Together, they marshalled opposition on the issue of patenting of seeds, which had come to the fore with the passage of the United States Plant Variety Protection Act, in 1970. This law, which was strengthened in 1980, and supplemented that year by a Supreme Court decision allowing the patenting of novel forms of bacteria, gave plant breeders a broad legal basis for claiming ownership of genetic resources.

As far back as Luther Burbank, the celebrated American plant breeder who was a contemporary and friend of Thomas Edison, breeders had complained about the injustice of awarding intellectual-property protection to novel mechanical devices and denying it to botanical inventions, even though a new plant might benefit millions. Soybeans, for example, which constitute the fourth-largest crop in the world, are self-pollinated, and can't be crossbred easily. Before the Plant Variety Protection Act, a breeder who wished to develop an improved variety of soybean could not expect much of a return on his investment, because farmers would have to buy the seed only once. But, with the protection of the act, which made it illegal to save patented seeds, the seed industry could justify much greater investment in research and development, because farmers would have to buy new seed or pay a license fee every year.

From the perspective of many developing nations, however, the American-led movement to patent seeds was an outrage. The industrialized countries of the North, having helped themselves to genes from the centers of diversity in the South, and having used them to create agricultural industries, were now asking the South to buy those genes back, in the form of patented seeds. According to Jack Kloppenburg, a professor of rural sociology at the University of Wisconsin, crops that originated in the Near East and Latin America make up sixty-six per cent of global food crop production; crops originating in North America and Europe represent less than five per cent, combined. The North was guilty of "bio-piracy"—a slogan that became popular in the nineteen-eighties. Armed with Vavilov's theory that the centers of diversity must be the centers of origin, India, Brazil, and Iran, among other countries, began to press their case in the F.A.O. for sovereignty over these resources. If the North wanted to claim ownership of patented seeds, the South would claim ownership of the genes from which those seeds were made. The Seed War was engaged.

By the mid-eighties, a "genetic OPEC" had begun to take shape. On coffee plantations in Central America, where a disease called coffee rust was a common threat, breeders wanted to return to Ethiopia, the origin of the coffee plant, and find a variety within the seed bank there that would be rust-resistant. But Ethiopia wouldn't allow breeders access to the coffee genes stored in its seed bank. The Jamaican government refused to allow the genes of allspice to be exported; India did the same with black pepper and turmeric seeds; Ecuador locked up its cacao seeds; Taiwan embargoed sugarcane; and Iran denied the world access to its pistachio collection.

Back in 1979, Fowler and Mooney had begun attending the F.A.O.'s annual conferences in Rome. The F.A.O., which was heavily weighted with Third World representatives, offered a mostly sympathetic forum to the notion of seeds as a genetic commons, part of the shared heritage of humanity, and it was generally hostile to the notion of seeds as commodities. At the 1981 conference, the Mexican delegation, having consulted with Fowler and Mooney, proposed the idea of an international seed bank. It would contain seeds from national and international seed banks, and patented seeds created by private seed companies. The North could have free access to the seeds from the centers of diversity only if the South could have free access to the patented seeds. This proposal was enthusiastically embraced by many developing nations, and, at the 1983 conference, the international seed bank became a central part of a non-legally binding document known as the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which was signed by more than a hundred and ten countries around the world.

WHY

is this man sitting here weeping
in this swanky restaurant
on his sixty-first birthday, because
his fear grows stronger each year,
because he's still the boy running
all out to first base, believing
getting there means everything,
because of the spiders climbing
the sycamore outside his house
this morning, the elegance of
a civilization free of delusion,
because of the boyish faces
of the five dead soldiers on TV,
the stoic curiosity in their eyes,
their belief in the righteousness
of sacrifice, because innocence
is the darkest place in the universe,

The bank was denounced by seed companies in the United States and other developed countries. The American Seed Trade Association said that the Undertaking "strikes at the heart of free enterprise and intellectual property rights." Seedsmen argued that patented seeds represented an enormous investment of labor and capital on their part; the unimproved coffee seeds in Ethiopia's seed bank weren't valuable until that investment was made. But Fowler maintained that even primitive landraces represented many generations of selection by farmers who lived around the centers of diversity, going back thousands of years. As he wrote in his book "Unnatural Selection," which was published in 1994, "Can we really say, that the modern plant breeder who turns out a disease-resistant tomato, wheat, or rice variety has done something more grand or worthy of reward than the farming community that first identified and conserved the disease-resistant characteristic in its fields?" He and Mooney began to advocate the concept of "farmers' rights," demanding a monetary system that would recognize the contributions made by farmers in developing nations from which the seeds were taken. As Fowler explained to me, "We were pointing out how unfair it was that after a century and a half of free and unimpeded gene flow from South to North, for the North to come along and say, O.K., now you have to pay for the genes—genes we took from you—because now we have a patent on them."

Gene splicing, first performed by Stanley Cohen and Herbert Boyer in 1973, allowed seed companies to offer a limitless range of products. Today's plant breeders can incorporate genes from plants that are not sexually compatible with each other. Indeed, because all living things share the same coded language of DNA, breeders can choose genes from outside the plant kingdom altogether—genes from bacteria, and even from fish, were used to create new kinds of genetically modified organisms, or G.M.O.s. This technology, in turn, led to a new type of seed company, the avatar of which is Monsanto, an ag-

because of the Iraqis on their hands
and knees looking for a bloody button,
a bitten fingernail, evidence of
their stolen significance, because
of the primitive architecture
of his dreams, the brutal egoism
of his ignorance, because he believes
in deliverance, the purity of sorrow,
the sanctity of truth, because of
the original human faces of his wife
and two boys smiling at him across
this glittering table, because of
their passion for commemoration,
their certainty that goodness continues,
because of the spiders clinging to
the elegance of each moment, because
getting there still means everything?

—*Philip Schultz*

richemical corporation headquartered in St. Louis, which is today the largest seed company in the world; other leading seed corporations include Bayer, Syngenta, and Dow, all of which have roots in the chemical or the pharmaceutical sector, rather than in the seed trade. Whereas Pioneer was a seed company that turned to genetic engineering as a way of improving its product—seeds—Monsanto was a chemical company that saw seeds as a delivery vehicle for its product, which was genes. Instead of creating seeds through hybridization, as Pioneer did, Monsanto would license genetically engineered traits to seed companies. Monsanto's Bt corn, which was introduced in the mid-nineties, incorporated genes taken from a soil bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, that provides these Bt crops with resistance to certain pests. Last year, about forty per cent of the U.S. corn crop was Bt corn. Food made with this and other types of genetically modified organisms is sold in virtually every supermarket in the United States, and does not require labelling. However, in Europe, and in some other parts of the world, G.M.O.s have attracted widespread protest by consumer groups, and are subject to much tougher regulations.

The consolidation of the seed industry, which began in the nineteen-seventies, has continued in the era of genetic engineering; fifty-five per cent of the seeds used to grow the world's food are sold by just ten global corporations. Large amounts of capital are required to create today's superseeds: biotech companies estimate that the research and regulatory costs of getting a single new genetically engineered trait on the market are as much as a hundred million dollars; a seed that offers two or three "stacked" traits—the state of the art in seed technology—may cost three hundred million dollars. These new seeds could help us cope with climate change and population growth, by producing crops designed to survive on less water, in hotter conditions, with even greater yields. At Pioneer Hi-Bred, which was bought by DuPont in 1999, three quarters of the company's seeds are G.M.O.s; corn plants are being developed for increased ethanol production, drought tolerance, and resistance to rootworm, corn borer, and fungal disease. Many new plant varieties are being designed for industrial uses. Corn, soybeans, sunflowers, and canola can all be used in the production of ethanol and biodiesel. Soybeans are being developed to produce higher yields of oil for ink, with an aim toward replacing traditional petroleum-based inks used in printing. In the United States, corn yields continue to rise; last year, American farmers produced nearly eleven million bushels, with an average yield of a hundred and forty-nine bushels an acre. Worldwide, a new green revolution could be in the offing.

The bad news is that the rest of the world isn't as enthusiastic about the new superseeds, perhaps because some countries are still coping with the social consequences of the last green revolution. Other countries worry about the long-term effects of G.M.O.s, which are banned from some markets. Many Europeans feel that genetic engineering is still too new and untested, and too many things could go wrong, from the unwanted pollination of conventional plants by the G.M.O. plants to unexpected health and dietary effects caused by eating G.M.O. food to an unforeseen blight that could wipe out a G.M.O. monoculture. Moreover, the old idea of feeding the world's hungry masses, which helped sell the first green revolution, hasn't been embraced as warmly this time. Instead, there is suspicion among developing nations that such talk is all an elaborate "double cross." As Jack Kloppenburg wrote in 2004, in his book "First the Seed," "The powerful tools of biotechnology are now being wielded largely by a narrow set of corporations which claim to want to use them to eliminate hunger, protect the environment, and cure disease, but which in fact simply want to use them as quickly as they can to make money just as fast as possible."

Plant breeders and seedsmen bitterly criticized Fowler and Mooney for politicizing the debate about genetic resources. By indirectly encouraging developing nations to deny plant breeders access to their seed banks, the activists were placing the responsibility for the conservation of those resources with countries whose unstable or dysfunctional governments couldn't be counted on to take the necessary measures. Many scientists felt that politics had no place in decisions about genetic conservation. Few wanted the governance of agricultural plants to follow the route that was eventually taken to guide the trade in medicinal plants—the Convention on Biological Diversity, which took effect in 1993. With the C.B.D., nations like Brazil, whose rain forests have long drawn bio-prospectors looking for new plant-based drugs and therapies, affirmed sovereignty over the genes within their borders. That system makes some sense when applied to the production of pharmaceuticals, which are distributed to narrowly focussed markets, but not to food, which is a worldwide resource. Even the countries within the centers of diversity depend heavily on imported crops to feed their populations. A similar treaty for world agriculture might mean that, in order to develop a variety of wheat using strains from numerous countries, individual agreements would have to be negotiated with every country. That was unthinkable.

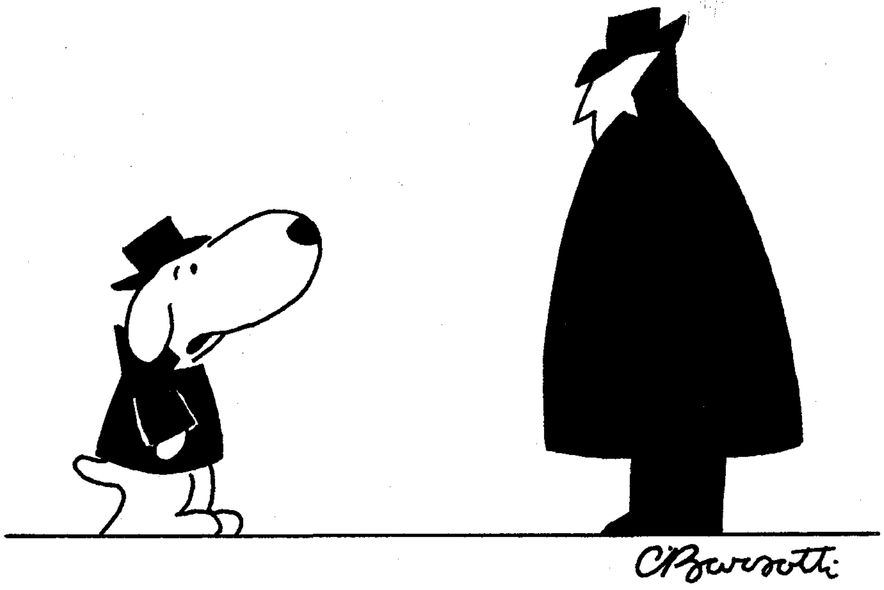
At an F.A.O. meeting that Fowler attended in 1981, the octogenarian Sir Otto Frankel, who was then among the world's most prominent plant scientists, angrily denounced Fowler in a Roman restaurant. Fowler told me, "Here I thought I was trying to do something good, and so to have one of the leading lights in the field just go off on me really made me question what I was doing." Among the people who witnessed the confrontation was Jack Harlan, who had inspired Fowler to take up the cause of genetic resources in the first place. Later, after Frankel left, Fowler went on, "I asked Harlan if he thought we were doing something that was bad, unproductive, destructive, and he said, 'I would never tell you that,' and then he said, 'They're going to fight you and call you names for five years, then there will be a period when things get a little bit better, and then in ten to fifteen years they will adopt all of your ideas but claim the credit for it themselves.' And that's pretty much what happened. At the third International Technical Conference, in 1983, I was viewed as a dangerous radical, and by the fourth conference, in 1996, I was in charge."

In 1993, the F.A.O. hired Fowler to oversee the drafting of a Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources—a first step toward a rational, worldwide seed-bank management plan. The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which was adopted by the U.N. in 2001 and has been ratified by most of the countries of the world, laid the legal groundwork for a global seed bank. The treaty is both a victory and a defeat for Fowler. It recognizes a version of the concept of "farmers' rights," and establishes a system of compensation for genes used in the creation of patented seeds. However, in return, the developing nations agree to drop their opposition to the principle of patenting seeds. In effect, Fowler has compromised one of his original principles, common heritage, in order to achieve the other.

Fowler and his colleagues knew where they wanted the vault to be—on the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. Although Norway took sovereignty over Svalbard in 1925, the archipelago has a long tradition as an international *terra nullius*—a no man's land. In the early nineteen-eighties, a backup site for the Nordic Gene Bank was created in a coal mine near the town of Longyearbyen. It contained the seeds from the five Nordic countries—Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Norway had proposed expanding the facility into a world seed vault, but, with the Seed War then raging, the idea was untenable. Now, however, with the treaty in place, and with a rising awareness of the ecological threat posed by climate change, the idea of an ultimate backup to all the other seed banks—a Doomsday vault—seized the imagination of officials in both Norway and Rome. In June, 2006, the groundbreaking ceremony at Svalbard was widely covered in the press all over the world.

The vault is not the seed bank that Fowler envisaged back in the eighties—a common bowl from which the world could feed as one. Far from it: each nation will have access to only its own seeds. Nor does the vault much resemble the world bank that Vavilov envisioned—a kind of breeders' utopia, in which the seeds of every kind of food plant in the world are available. In 2006, thirty million new acres of G.M.O.s were planted, bringing the total worldwide acreage to two hundred and fifty-two million acres—about seven per cent of the world's cropland. Altogether, more than ten million farmers from twenty-two countries planted biotech crops in 2006. But few, if any, of these seeds are going into the Svalbard vault. Seed companies have shown little interest in putting them there, and, in any case, Norway severely restricts bringing G.M.O.s into the country, even though, as Fowler put it to me, the seeds in the vault would be kept in "multi-ply packages, inside sealed boxes, inside an air-lock chamber, behind multiple locked doors, inside a mountain, frozen to minus twenty, in an Arctic environment in which no seed would survive even if it escaped."

As the use of biotech crops continues to grow, the seeds in the vault will represent an ever-smaller share of the seeds actually growing in fields around the world. An apt symbol of this is what happened in Iraq, the birthplace of agriculture, following the United States-led invasion. Even though Iraq's traditional varieties were preserved in Aleppo, the United States encouraged the use of seeds provided by American companies, many of them G.M.O.s, which were distributed by the United States military as part of



"They rubbed my tummy, chief—I told them everything."

Operation Amber Waves. Order 81, issued in 2004 by Paul Bremer, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, prohibited Iraqi farmers from reusing these seeds, forcing them instead to purchase licenses from corporations to receive new seed each year.

I accompanied Fowler to Svalbard, to visit the site of the Doomsday vault. We flew from Oslo to Longyearbyen, a settlement of some two thousand inhabitants, and the northernmost destination on earth serviced by regularly scheduled flights; it's about eight hundred miles from the North Pole. From the air, I could see the craggy, snow-covered peaks thrusting some five thousand feet into the air—the mountain range discovered by the Dutch explorer Willem Barents in 1596, when he ran into it while trying to sail over the top of the world. For the next two hundred years, Svalbard was an international center of whaling, but by the end of the eighteenth century the bowhead whale had been hunted to extinction in these waters. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Svalbard was used by hunters, mainly Russians and Norwegians, whose greatest prize was the thick white coats of the polar bears that roamed the islands and the surrounding ice floes. (The polar bears survived, barely, although now climate change is threatening them with extinction once again.) The huts of some of the most famous hunters and trappers of the era remain, scattered on the snow.

Longyearbyen is on Spitsbergen, the largest of the islands, which means "jagged mountains" in Dutch. Its regular inhabitants live in neat wooden structures that are painted in bright colors. In the early twentieth century, Svalbard became a center of coal mining, and, on the crags above the town, the old mining trellises, which were used to bring coal out of the mines, can be seen: stark structures with thick cables strung between them. There is still some mining on Spitsbergen, but these days the Longyearbyen economy is driven mainly by the thousands of tourists who come during the summer months to explore one of the last true wildernesses in Europe, and to watch the Fourteenth of July glacier, at Krossfjord, on the northern side of Spitsbergen, calve into the Barents Sea.

Rune Bergstrom, the chief environmental officer for Svalbard, drove us to the site of the vault, halfway up one of the mountains visible from Longyearbyen. As we left town, he pointed out the graves of miners who died in the influenza epidemic of 1918. Scientists hoping to study the virus had taken tissue samples from the bodies in 1998. We followed a winding road up a steep ridge that was lightly covered with a fine, dry snow—a kind of Arctic sand. Along the road we saw two Svalbard reindeer: odd, goat-size animals, with comically stunted legs and long, awkward-looking antlers.

The vault is tunnelled into the sandstone rock face of one of the mountains, near the old mine in which the backup to the Nordic Gene Bank is stored. The design is straightforward: from the entrance, a long tube lined with steel and concrete leads straight back to three large rectangular concrete rooms, which will house the seeds, on shelves. Surrounding the entrance of the shaft will be a twenty-seven-foot-tall concrete structure. A series of colored lights will be embedded in the top—an artist's installation. In November, as the four-month-long polar night settles over Svalbard, the lights will begin to pulse, producing a curtain of light that will change according to the lighting conditions of the Arctic. It will be visible far across the Barents Sea, out on the ice floes that the polar bears roam. When the sun returns, in late February, the lights will go out and the reflective surface will glow with the light of the never-setting sun.

To get a better sense of what it will feel like to be deep inside the mountain, we visited the Nordic bank. It was a relatively warm day—about twenty degrees Fahrenheit. In a mining shed, we donned blue overalls, helmets, headlamps, and gas masks, and followed a miner down the abandoned mine, stepping carefully over railway trestles on the tunnel floor. From time to time, we could see black seams of unmined coal in the walls. About two hundred yards in, we came to a large wooden door, which was frozen shut. The miner pounded on it with a sledgehammer until finally it swung open to reveal a smaller door, which was also frozen. Behind that was a large black steel cage, filled with crates. Frost covered the bars, and the ice crystals glistened in the beam of our headlamps. Fowler climbed inside the cage and opened one of the wooden lids. Inside, packed in foam peanuts, were sealed glass ampules, with acquisition numbers etched in the frosty glass. The ampules contained seeds, about five hundred of each variety, of two hundred and thirty-seven species.

Back outside, I wondered what would happen if the sea levels rise as much as some scientists predict they will. "We are a hundred and thirty metres above sea level," Fowler replied, his breath frosting. "The max sea-level rise under the worst-case climate-change scenario is eighty metres, so, whatever happens, the seeds should be safe." But who can predict what will happen if the ice melts? A northern sea lane could open year-round between Europe and Asia (the passage that Willem Barents was looking for in 1596, when his vessel became trapped in the ice), and Svalbard could take on the strategic importance that Malta held for centuries, when it was a midpoint between the Christian and Islamic worlds. Will the seeds themselves be viable in a world that warm? Even if they can grow, they won't have evolved the defenses necessary to ward off all the new pests and diseases that will appear. On the other hand, perhaps a few of the seeds inside the vault will hold the answers for the farmers of the future. "When you think about it, the plants have already been there," Fowler said. "When Columbus brought maize to Europe—that was a climate change. When maize then went to Africa, that was a climate change. We need to figure out how the plants were able to adapt to these changes, and repackage those traits."

Far away in the distance, I could see one of the old hunters' shacks, and I thought of the bowhead whale, hunted to extinction by eighteenth-century whalers, and of the polar bears, struggling for survival on the ice floes. Species extinction seems to be the baseline in humanity's relationship with the natural world; the notion of sanctuary is a relatively new and tenuous idea. But Fowler's craggy face, seen against the mountains, showed no trace of doubt. ♦

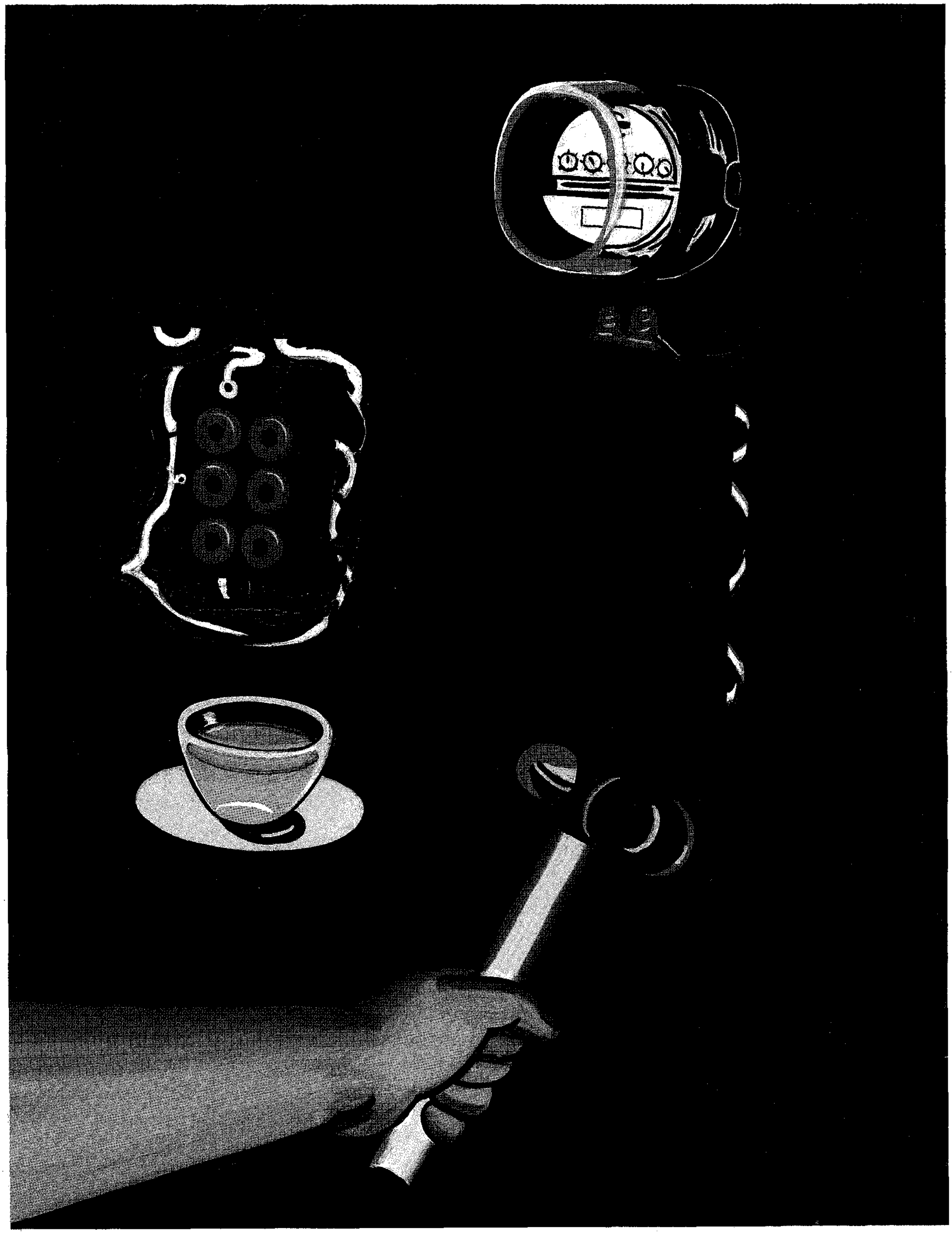
NEWYORKER.COM

An audio interview with John Seabrook.

FICTION

NAWABDIN ELECTRICIAN

BY DANIYAL MUEENUDDIN



He flourished on a signature ability: a technique for cheating the electric company by slowing down the revolutions of its meters, so cunningly performed that his customers could specify to the hundred-rupee note the desired monthly savings. In this Pakistani desert, behind Multan, where the tube wells pumped from the aquifer day and night, Nawab's discovery eclipsed the philosopher's stone. Some thought he used magnets, others said heavy oil or porcelain chips or a substance he found in beehives. Skeptics reported that he had a deal with the meter men. In any case, this trick guaranteed Nawab's employment, both off and on the farm of his patron, K. K. Harouni.

The farm lay strung along a narrow and pitted farm-to-market road, built in the nineteen-seventies, when Harouni still had influence in the Islamabad bureaucracy. Buff or saline-white desert dragged out between fields of sugarcane and cotton, mango orchards and clover and wheat, soaked daily by the tube wells that Nawabdin Electrician tended. Beginning the rounds of Nurpur Harouni on his itinerant mornings, summoned to a broken pump, Nawab and his bicycle bumped along, decorative plastic flowers swaying on wires sprouting from the frame. His tools, notably a three-pound ball-peen hammer, clanked in a greasy leather bag suspended from the handlebars. The farmhands and the manager waited in the cool of the banyans, planted years earlier to shade each of the tube wells. "No tea, no tea," Nawab insisted, waving away the steaming cup.

Hammer dangling from his hand like a savage's axe, Nawab entered the oily room housing the pump and its electric motor. Silence. The men crowded the doorway till he shouted that he must have light. He approached the offending object warily but with his temper rising, circled it, pushed it about a bit, began to take liberties with it, settled in with it, called for a cup of tea next to it, and finally began disassembling it. With his long, blunt screwdriver he cracked the shields hiding the machine's penetralia, a screw popping loose and flying into the shadows. He took the ball-peen and delivered a crafty blow. The intervention failed. Pondering the situation, he ordered one of the farmworkers to find a really thick piece of leather and to collect sticky mango sap from a nearby tree. So it went, all morning and into the afternoon, Nawab trying one thing and then another, heating the pipes, cooling them, joining wires together, circumventing switches and fuses. And yet somehow, in fulfillment of the local genius for crude improvisation, the pumps continued to run.

STEVE POWERS

Unfortunately or fortunately, Nawab had married early in life a sweet woman of unsurpassed fertility, whom he adored, and she proceeded to bear him children spaced, if not less than nine months apart, then not that much more. And all daughters, one after another after another, until finally the looked-for son arrived, leaving Nawab with a complete set of twelve girls, ranging from toddler to age eleven, and one odd piece. If he had been governor of the Punjab, their dowries would have beggared him. For an electrician and mechanic, no matter how light-fingered, there seemed no question of marrying them all off. No moneylender in his right mind would, at any rate of interest, advance a sufficient sum to buy the necessary items for each daughter: beds, a dresser, trunks, electric fans, dishes, six suits of clothes for the groom, six for the bride, perhaps a television, and on and on and on.

Another man might have thrown up his hands—but not Nawabdin. The daughters acted as a spur to his genius, and he looked with satisfaction in the mirror each morning at the face of a warrior going out to do battle. Nawab of course knew that he must proliferate his sources of revenue—the salary he received from K. K. Harouni for tending the tube wells would not even begin to suffice. He set up a one-room flour mill, run off a condemned electric motor—condemned by him. He tried his hand at fish-farming in a pond at the edge of one of his master's fields. He bought broken radios, fixed them, and resold them. He did not demur even when asked to fix watches, although that enterprise did spectacularly badly, and earned him more kicks than kudos, for no watch he took apart ever kept time again.

K. K. Harouni lived mostly in Lahore and rarely visited his farms. Whenever the old man did visit, Nawab would place himself night and day at the door leading from the servants' sitting area into the walled grove of ancient banyan trees where the old farmhouse stood. Grizzled, his peculiar aviator glasses bent and smudged, Nawab tended the household machinery, the air-conditioners, water heaters, refrigerators, and pumps, like an engineer tending the boilers on a foundering steamer in an Atlantic gale. By his superhuman efforts, he almost managed to maintain K. K. Harouni in the same mechanical cocoon, cooled and bathed and lighted and fed, that the landowner enjoyed in Lahore.

Harouni, of course, became familiar with this ubiquitous man, who not only accompanied him on his tours of inspection but could be found morning and night standing on the master bed rewiring the light fixture or poking at the water heater in the bathroom. Finally, one evening at teatime, gauging the psychological moment, Nawab asked if he might say a word. The landowner, who was cheerfully filing his nails in front of a crackling rosewood fire, told him to go ahead.

"Sir, as you know, your lands stretch from here to the Indus, and on these lands are fully seventeen tube wells, and to tend these seventeen tube wells there is but one man, me, your servant. In your service I have earned these gray hairs"—here he bowed his head to show the gray—"and now I cannot fulfill my duties as I should. Enough, sir, enough. I beg you, forgive me my weakness. Better a darkened house and proud hunger within than disgrace in the light of day. Release me, I ask you, I beg you."

The old man, well accustomed to these sorts of speeches, though not usually this florid, filed away at his nails and waited for the breeze to stop.

"What's the matter, Nawabdin?"

"Matter, sir? Oh, what could be the matter in your service? I've eaten your salt for all my years. But, sir, on the bicycle now, with my old legs, and with the many injuries I've received when heavy machinery fell on me—I cannot any longer bicycle about like a bridegroom from farm to farm, as I could when I first had the good fortune to enter your service. I beg you, sir, let me go."

"And what is the solution?" Harouni asked, seeing that they had come to the crux. He didn't particularly care one way or the other, except that it touched on his comfort—a matter of great interest to him.

"Well, sir, if I had a motorcycle, then

I could somehow limp along, at least until I train up some younger man."

The crops that year had been good, Harouni felt expansive in front of the fire, and so, much to the disgust of the farm managers, Nawab received a brand-new motorcycle, a Honda 70. He even managed to extract an allowance for gasoline.

The motorcycle increased his status, gave him weight, so that people began calling him Uncle and asking his opinion on world affairs, about which he knew absolutely nothing. He could now range farther, doing much wider business. Best of all, now he could spend every night with his wife, who early in the marriage had begged to live not in Nawab's quarters in the village but with her family in Firoza, near the only girls' school in the area. A long straight road ran from the canal headworks near Firoza all the way to the Indus, through the heart of the K. K. Harouni lands. The road ran on the bed of an old highway built when these lands lay within a princely state. Some hundred and fifty years ago, one of the princes had ridden that way, going to a wedding or a funeral in this remote district, felt hot, and ordered that rosewood trees be planted to shade the passersby. Within a few hours, he forgot that he had given the order, and in a few dozen years he in turn was forgotten, but these trees still stood, enormous now, some of them dead and looming without bark, white and leafless. Nawab would fly down this road on his new machine, with bags and streamers hanging from every knob and brace, so that the bike, when he hit a bump, seemed to be flapping numerous small vestigial wings; and with his grinning face, as he rolled up to whichever tube well needed servicing, with his ears almost blown off, he shone with the speed of his arrival.

Nawab's day, viewed from the air, would have appeared as aimless as that of a butterfly: to the senior manager's house in the morning, where he diligently paid his respects, then to one or another of the tube wells, kicking up dust on the unpaved field roads, into the town of Firoza, zooming beneath the rosewoods, a bullet of sound, moseying around town, sneaking away to one of his private interests—to cement a deal to distribute ripening early-season honeydews from his cousin's vegetable plot, or to count before hatching his half share in a flock of chickens—then back to Nurpur Harouni, and out again. The maps of these days, superimposed, would have made a tangle, but every morning he emerged from the same place, just as the sun came up, and every evening he returned there, tired now, darkened, switching off the bike, rolling it over the wooden threshold of the door leading into the courtyard, the engine ticking as it cooled. Nawab leaned the bike on its kickstand each evening and waited for his girls to come, all of them, around him, jumping on him. His face at this moment often had the same expression—an expression of childish innocent joy, which contrasted strangely and even sadly with the heaviness of his face and its lines and stubble. He would raise his nose and sniff the air to see if he could guess what his wife had cooked for dinner, and then he went in to her, finding her always in the same posture, making him tea, fanning the fire in the hearth.

"Hello, my love, my chicken piece," he said tenderly one evening, walking into the dark hut that served as a kitchen, the mud walls black with soot. "What's in the pot for me?" He opened the cauldron, which had been displaced by the kettle onto the beaten-earth floor, and began to search around in it with a wooden spoon.

"Out! Out!" she said, taking the spoon and, dipping it into the curry, giving him a taste.

He opened his mouth obediently, like a boy receiving medicine. The wife, despite having borne thirteen children, had a lithe strong body, her vertebrae visible beneath her tight tunic. Her long mannish face still glowed from beneath the skin, giving her a ripe ochre coloring. Even now that her hair was thin and graying, she wore it in a single long braid down to her waist, like a young woman in the village. Although this style didn't suit her, Nawab saw in her still the girl he had married twenty years before. He stood in the door, watching his daughters playing hopscotch, and when his wife went past he stuck out his butt, so that she rubbed against it as she squeezed through.

Nawab ate first, then the girls, and finally his wife. He sat out in the courtyard, burping and smoking a cigarette, looking up at the crescent moon just visible on the horizon. I wonder what the moon is made of? he thought, without exerting himself. He remembered listening to the radio when the Americans said they had walked on it. His thoughts wandered off onto all sorts of tangents. The dwellers around him in the hamlet had also finished their dinners, and the smoke from cow-dung fires hung over the darkening roofs, a harsh spicy smell, like rough tobacco. Nawab's house had numerous ingenious contrivances—running water in all three rooms, a duct that brought cool air into the rooms at night, and even a black-and-white television, which his wife covered with a doily that she had embroidered with flowers. Nawab had constructed a gear mechanism so that the antenna on the roof could be turned from inside the house to improve reception. The children sat inside watching it, with the sound blaring. His wife came out and sat primly at his feet on the sagging ropes of the woven bed, swinging her legs.

"I've got something in my pocket—would you like to know what?" He looked at her with a pouting sort of smile.

"I know this game," she said, reaching up and straightening his glasses on his face. "Why are your glasses always crooked? I think one ear's higher than the other."

"If you find it, you can have it."

Looking to see that the children were still absorbed in the television, she kneeled next to him and began patting his pockets. "Lower . . . lower . . . ," he said. In the pocket of the greasy vest that he wore under his kurta she found a wrapped-up newspaper holding chunks of raw brown sugar.

"I've got lots more," he said. "Look at that. None of this junk you buy in the bazaar. The Dashtis gave me five kilos for repairing their sugarcane press. I'll sell it tomorrow. Make us some parathas. For all of us? Pretty please?"

"I put out the fire."

"So light it. Or, rather, you just sit here—I'll light it."

"You can never light it. I'll end up doing it anyway," she said, getting up.

The smaller children, smelling the ghee cooking on the griddle, crowded around, watching the brown sugar melt, and finally even the older girls came in, though they stood haughtily to one side.

Nawab, squatting and huffing on the fire, gestured to them. "Come on, you princesses, none of your tricks. I know you want some."

They began eating, pouring the brown

crystallized syrup onto pieces of fried bread, and after a while Nawab went to his motorcycle and pulled from the panniers another hunk of the sugar, challenging the girls to see who would eat most.

One evening a few weeks after his family's little festival of sugar, Nawab was sitting with the watchman who kept guard over the grain stores at Nurpur Harouni. A banyan planted alongside the threshing floor only thirty years ago had grown a canopy of forty or fifty feet, and all the men who worked in the stores tended it carefully, watering it with cans. The old watchman sat under this tree, and Nawab and the other younger men would sit with him at dusk, teasing him, trying to make his violent temper flare up, and joking around with one another. They would listen to the old man's stories, of the time when only dirt tracks led through these riverine tracts and the tribes stole cattle for sport, and often killed each other while doing it, to add piquancy.

Although spring weather had come, the watchman still kept a fire burning in a tin pan to warm his feet and to give a center to the group that gathered there. The electricity had failed, as it often did, and the full moon climbing the sky lit the scene indirectly, reflecting off the whitewashed walls, throwing dim shadows around the machinery strewn about, plows and planters, drags, harrows.

"Here it is, old man," Nawab said to the watchman. "I'll tie you up and lock you in the stores to make it look like a robbery, and then I'll top off my tank at the gas barrel."

"Nothing in it for me," the watchman said. "Go on, I think I hear your wife calling you."

"I understand, sire. You wish to be alone."

Nawab jumped up and shook the watchman's hand, making a bow, touching his hands deferentially to the old man's knee, as he would to the feudal K. K. Harouni—a running joke, lost on the watchman these last ten years.

"Be careful, boy," the watchman said, standing up and leaning on his bamboo staff, clad in steel at the tip.

Nawab leapt on the kick-starter of his motorcycle, and in one smooth motion flicked on the lights and shot out of the threshing-floor gates, onto the quarter-mile driveway leading from the heart of the farm to the road. He felt cold and liked it, knowing that at home the room would be baking, the two-bar heater running day and night on pilfered electricity, the family luxuriating in excess warmth, even though the spring weather had come. Turning onto the dark main road, he sped up, outrunning the weak headlight, obstacles appearing faster than he could react, feeling as if he were racing forward in the flame of a moving lantern. Nightjars perching on the road as they hunted moths ricocheted into the dark, almost under his wheel. Nawab locked his arms, fighting the bike as he flew over potholes, enjoying the pace, standing on the pegs. Among low-lying fields, where the sugarcane had been heavily watered, mist rose and cool air enveloped him. He slowed, turning onto the smaller road running beside the canal, hearing the water rushing over the locks of the headworks.

A man stepped from beside one of the locks, waving down at the ground, motioning Nawab to stop.

"Brother," the man said, over the puttering engine, "give me a ride into town. I've got business, and I'm late."

Strange business at this time of night, Nawab thought, the tail-light of the motorcycle casting a reddish glow around them on the ground. They were far from any dwellings. A mile away, the village of Dashtian crouched beside the road—before that there was nothing. He looked into the man's face.

"Where are you from?" The man looked straight back at him, his face pinched and therefore overstated, but unflinching.

"From Kashmor. Please, you're the first person to come by for over an hour. I've walked all day."

Kashmor, Nawab thought. From the poor country across the river. Every year, those tribes came to pick the mangoes at Nurpur Harouni and other nearby farms, working for almost nothing, let go as soon as the harvest thinned. The men would give a feast, a thin feast, at the end of the season, a hundred or more going shares to buy a buffalo. Nawab had been several times, and was treated as if he were honoring them, sitting with them and eating the salty rice flecked with bits of meat.

He grinned at the man, gesturing with his chin to the seat behind him. "All right, then, get on the back."

Balancing against the weight behind him, which made driving along the rutted canal road difficult, Nawab pushed on, under the rosewood trees.

Half a mile from the headworks, the man shouted into Nawab's ear, "Stop!"

"What's wrong?" Nawab couldn't hear over the rushing wind.

The man jabbed something hard into his ribs.

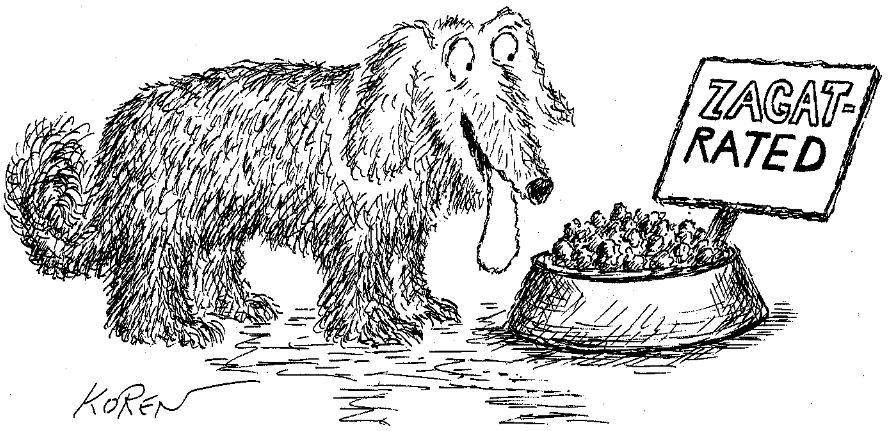
"I've got a gun. I'll shoot you."

Panicked, Nawab skidded to a stop and jumped to one side, pushing the motorcycle away from him, so that it tipped over, knocking the robber to the ground. The carburetor float hung open, and the engine raced for a minute, the wheel jerking, until the engine sputtered and died, extinguishing the headlight.

"What are you doing?" Nawab babbled.

"I'll shoot you if you don't stand back," the robber said, rising up on one knee, the gun pointed at Nawab.

They stood obscured in the sudden woolly dark, next to the fallen motorcycle,



which leaked raw-smelling gasoline into the dust underfoot. Water running through the reeds in the canal beside them made soft gulping sounds as it swirled along. His eyes adjusting to the dark, Nawab saw the man sucking at a cut on his palm, the gun held in his other hand.

When the man went to pick up the bike, Nawab approached a step toward him.

"I told you, I'll shoot you."

Nawab put his hands together in supplication. "I beg you, I've got little girls, thirteen children. I promise, thirteen. I tried to help you. I'll drive you to Firoza, and I won't tell anyone. Don't take the bike—it's my daily bread. I'm a man like you, poor as you."

"Shut up."

Without thinking, a flash of cunning in his eyes, Nawab lunged for the gun, but missed. For a moment the two men grappled, until the robber broke free, stepped back, and fired. Nawab fell to the ground, holding his groin with both hands, entirely surprised, shocked, as if the man had slapped him for no reason.

The man dragged the bike away, straddled it, and tried to start it, bobbing up and down, pitching his weight onto the lever, the engine whirring but not catching. It had flooded, and he held the throttle wide open, which made it worse. At the sound of the shot, the dogs in Dashtian had begun to bark, the sound fitful in the breeze.

Lying on the ground, at first Nawab thought the man had killed him. The pale moonlit sky, seen through the branches of the rosewood tree, tilted back and forth like a bowl of swaying water. He had fallen with one leg bent under him, and now he straightened it. His hand came away sticky when he touched the wound. "O God, O Mother, O God," he moaned, not very loudly, in a singsong voice. He looked at the man, whose back was turned, vulnerable, kicking wildly at the starter, not six feet away. Nawab couldn't let him take it away—not the bike, his toy, his freedom.

He stood up again and stumbled forward, but his injured leg buckled and he fell, his forehead hitting the rear bumper of the motorcycle. Turning in the seat, holding the gun at arm's length, the robber fired five more times, one two three four five, with Nawab looking up into his face in disbelief, seeing the repeated flame in the revolver's mouth. The man had never used weapons, had fired this unlicensed revolver only one time, to try it out when he bought it from a bootlegger. He couldn't bear to point at the torso or the head, but shot at the groin and the legs. The last two bullets missed wildly, throwing up dirt in the road. The robber rolled the motorcycle forward twenty feet, grunting, and again tried to start it. From Dashtian a torch jogged quickly down the road. Throwing the bike to the ground, the man ran into a stand of reeds that bordered a field.

Nawab lay in the road, not wanting to move. When the bullets first hit him, they didn't so much hurt as sting, but now the pain grew worse. The blood felt warm in his pants.

It seemed very peaceful. In the distance, the dogs kept barking, and all around the cicadas called, so many of them that they blended into a single gentle sound. In a mango orchard across the canal, some crows began cawing, and he wondered why they were calling at night. Maybe a snake up in the tree, in the nest. Fresh fish from the spring floods of the Indus had just come onto the market, and he kept remembering that he had wanted to buy some for dinner, perhaps the next night. As the pain grew worse, he thought of that, the smell of frying fish.

Two men from the village came running up, one much younger than the other, both of them bare-chested. The elder, potbellied, carried an ancient single-barrelled shotgun, the butt mended crudely with wire.

"Oh God, they've killed him. Who is it?"

The younger man kneeled down next to the body. "It's Nawab, the electrician, from Nurpur Harouni."

"I'm not dead," Nawab said insistently, without raising his head. He knew these men, a father and son—he had arranged the lighting at the son's wedding. "The bastard's right there in those reeds."

Stepping forward, aiming into the center of the clump, the older man fired, reloaded, and fired again. Nothing moved among the green leafy stalks, which were head high and surmounted by feathers of seed.

"He's gone," the young man said, sitting next to Nawab, holding his arm.

The father walked carefully forward, holding the gun to his shoulder. Something moved, and he fired. The robber fell forward into the open ground. He called, "Mother, help me," and got up on his knees, holding his hands to his waist. Walking up to him, the father hit him once in the middle of the back with the butt of the gun, and then threw down the gun and dragged him roughly by his collar onto the road. Raising the bloody shirt, he saw that the robber had taken half a dozen buckshot pellets in the stomach—black angry holes seeping blood in the light of the torch. The robber kept spitting, without any force.

The son got up and started the motorcycle by pushing it down the road with the gears engaged, until the engine came to life. Shouting that he would get some transport, he raced off, and Nawab winced, hearing the man, in his hurry, shifting without using the clutch.

"Do you want a cigarette, Uncle?" the old villager said to Nawab, offering the pack.

Nawab rolled his head back and forth. "Fuck, look at me."

In the silence, a forgotten thought kept bothering Nawab, something important. Then he remembered.

"Find the guy's revolver, Bholay. You're going to need it for the cops."

"I can't leave you," he said. But after a minute he threw away his cigarette and got up.

The old man was still searching in the reeds when the lights of a pickup materialized at the canal headworks and bounced wildly down the road. The driver, doubtful of the whole affair, stood by while the father and son lifted Nawab and the motorcycle thief into the back. They drove to Firoza, to a private clinic there, run by a mere pharmacist, who nevertheless kept a huge clientele because of his abrupt and sure manner and his success at healing all the prevalent diseases with the same few medicines.

The clinic smelled of disinfectant and of bodily fluids, a heavy sweetish odor. Four beds stood in a room, dimly lit by a fluorescent tube. As the father and son carried him in, Nawab, alert to the point of strain, observed blood on some rumpled sheets, a rusty blot. The pharmacist, who lived above the clinic, had come down wearing a loincloth and undershirt. He seemed perfectly unflustered, if anything slightly cross at having been disturbed.

"Put them on those two beds."

"*As salaam aleikum*, Dr. Sahib," said Nawab, who felt as if he were speaking to someone very far away. The pharmacist seemed an immensely grave and important man, and Nawab spoke to him formally.

"What happened, Nawab?"

"He tried to snatch my motorbike, but I didn't let him."

The pharmacist pulled off Nawab's shalwar, got a rag, and washed away the blood, then poked around quite roughly, while Nawab held the sides of the bed and willed himself not to scream. "You'll live," he said. "You're a lucky man. The bullets all went low."

"Did it hit . . ."

The pharmacist dabbed with the rag. "Not even that, thank God."

The robber must have been hit in the lung, for he kept breathing up blood.

"You won't need to bother taking this one to the police," the pharmacist said. "He's a dead man."

"Please," the robber begged, trying to raise himself up. "Have mercy, save me. I'm a human being also."

The pharmacist went into the office next door and wrote the names of drugs on a pad, sending the villager's son to a dispenser in the next street.

"Wake him and tell him it's Nawabdin the electrician. Tell him I'll make sure he gets the money."

Nawab looked over at the robber for the first time. There was blood on his pillow, and he kept snuffling, as if he needed to blow his nose. His thin and very long neck hung crookedly on his shoulder, as if out of joint. He was older than Nawab had thought, not a boy, dark-skinned, with sunken eyes and protruding yellow smoker's teeth, which showed whenever he twitched for breath.

"I did you wrong," the robber said weakly. "I know that. You don't know my life, just as I don't know yours. Even I don't know what brought me here. Maybe you're a poor man, but I'm much poorer than you. My mother is old and blind, in the slums outside Multan. Make them fix me, ask them to and they'll do it." He began to cry, not wiping away the tears, which drew lines on his dark face.

"Go to hell," Nawab said, turning away. "Men like you are good at confessions. My children would have begged in the streets."

The robber lay heaving, moving his fingers by his sides. The pharmacist seemed to have gone away somewhere.

"They just said that I'm dying. Forgive me for what I did. I was brought up with kicks and slaps and never enough to eat. I've never had anything of my own, no land, no house, no wife, no money, never, nothing. I slept for years on the railway-station platform in Multan. My mother's blessing on you. Give me your blessing, don't let me die unforgiven." He began snuffling and coughing even more, and then started hiccupping.

Now the disinfectant smelled strong and good to Nawab. The floor seemed to shine. The world around him expanded.

"Never. I won't forgive you. You had your life, I had mine. At every step of the road I went the right way and you the wrong. Look at you now, with bubbles of blood stuck in the corner of your lips. Do you think this isn't a judgment? My wife and children would have wept all their lives, and you would have sold my motorbike to pay for six unlucky hands of cards and a few bottles of poison home brew. If you weren't lying here now, you would already be in one of the gambling camps along the river."

The man said, "Please, please, please," more softly each time, and then he stared up at the ceiling. "It's not true," he whispered. After a few minutes, he convulsed and died. The pharmacist, who had come back in by then and was cleaning Nawab's wounds, did nothing to help him.

Yet Nawab's mind caught at this, at the man's words and his death, like a bird hopping around some bright object, meaning to peck at it. And then he didn't. He thought of the motorcycle, saved, and the glory of saving it. Six shots, six coins thrown down, six chances, and not one of them had killed him, not Nawabdin Electrician. ♦

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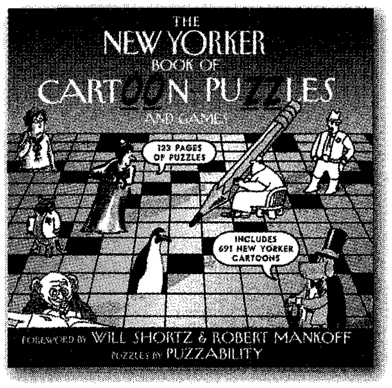
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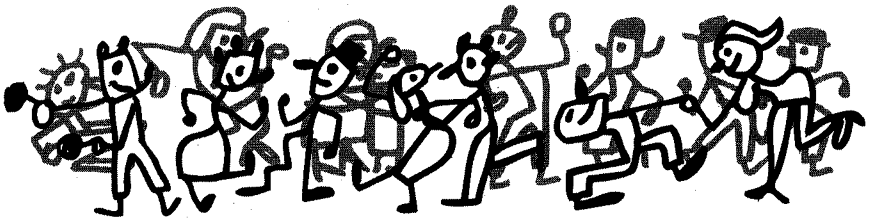

THE CURRENT CINEMA

LONE SAILORS

The films of Michelangelo Antonioni and "Deep Water."

BY ANTHONY LANE

A man and a woman go for a walk in Turin. They have just made love in the afternoon, or, at any rate, spent time in a hotel room, talking about how difficult it is to find time to make love, or to talk. Simply to get out feels like a liberation. It must have been raining, because the street is damp, and the air is a milky haze. We see the pair strolling hand in hand toward a lamppost. She passes to the right of the post, he to the left; their locked hands bump against it, uncouple, and pull apart. The spell is broken. Nonetheless, for a moment, in the light of early evening, life was sweet.

The scene comes from "The Girlfriends" (1955), a film by Michelangelo Antonioni, and it is worth revisiting, because anyone who knew little of the director—who perhaps learned of him only when he died, on July 30th, at ninety-four—could be forgiven for believing, on the strength of the obituaries, that here was a merchant of the miserable. The impression delivered even by those who admired him is not just that Antonioni films were bleak but that the bleakness was unleavened; worse still, that the man himself was above all an intellectual, who happened to choose film as the medium in which to vent the results of his cogitation. Neither of these judgments is accurate, and, taken together, they are guaranteed to send novices scurrying for cover. All I can say is: hold your nerve, go online, order a stash of Antonioni, lie back with a grappa, and stare.

You will still be missing plenty, because his work demands to be seen on the big screen, every bit as vehemently as "Ben-Hur," and one hopes that the repertory houses will pay homage before long. Even with a wide-screen TV, and the ravishing, polka-dot-perfect print that is available on Criterion DVD, what will Antonioni's most acclaimed film, "L'Avventura," look like in your living room? Will television not crunch and clutter the final shot—a man half-slumped on a bench, a woman standing next to him, and the menace of Mt. Etna in the distance—and thus deprive you of its serene and spacious despair? Will the movie freak you out, as it did the audience at Cannes in 1960, when the première was met with catcalls?

Even now, I wonder what spooked the cats. They may have mistrusted the sequence set in a depopulated modern village, all cubes and arches, but nobody who had ever inspected a de Chirico painting would be taken aback. As for the plot, which sees a beautiful woman go missing from a volcanic island on a pleasure trip, only for her lover to seduce her best friend, there was a sheen of robotic amorality about these wealthy folk, but nothing that would have caused Bette Davis to raise more than an eyebrow. (Why do so many masterpieces, including Rossellini's "Stromboli," Bergman's "Persona," and Godard's "Contempt" and "Pierrot le Fou," focus, with a pagan fierceness, on women beside the ocean? Did Picasso lead them there?) We never learn the fate of the lost beauty, and it may be that by 1960 the idea of a climax that was not a closure felt like a profound offense—to viewers' sense of narrative neatness, to their faith in love as a cure for loneliness, and to their conviction that experience can be packaged and put to rights. Again, however, this was scarcely new, as shown by Henry James, whose later tales are like prophesies of Antonioni; there is even one called "The Bench of Desolation," written fifty years before "L'Avventura," which brings together a man and a woman, by the sea, and discovers "the vanity, the profanity, the impossibility, of anything between them but silence."

This is not to say that the Italian was a novelist manqué. He was, to a degree, ill served by the hothouse of philosophical debate in which his films of the nineteen-sixties were dissected and swooned over. I am at once jealous of moviegoers who saw them in New York or Paris at the time and grateful that I was spared the ordeal; I saw them later, on my own, unaware of what had been all the rage. To me they were, before anything else, exquisitely marshalled appeals to one's sight, sound, taste, and rustling touch. I could do everything but smell them. I gave my heart to Lucia Bosé in "Story of a Love Affair" (1950), and never looked back; the fact that Antonioni was filming women in the age of the cinched waist, the pencil skirt, the fur collar, and the blindingly white blouse felt like the happiest of historical coincidences. No wonder "Blow-Up" (1966) came as such an embarrassment: one look at the clothes and the haircuts of swinging London, and you knew that Antonioni should not have forsaken his native ground.

If Hitchcock's tombstone bore the word "suspense," what would we engrave on Antonioni's? "Alienation," probably, yet that is a word forever applied *to* the films, not spoken within them. You may disagree with his vision of the sexes fighting to make connections that endure, as opposed to mere spasms of desire (*avventura* means not just an adventure but a fling), but there is no denying the sharp, concrete form in which that vision was set—actual concrete, if you remember Jeanne

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Monica Vitti with Antonioni in Paris in 1960 at a showing of his most acclaimed film, "L'Avventura."

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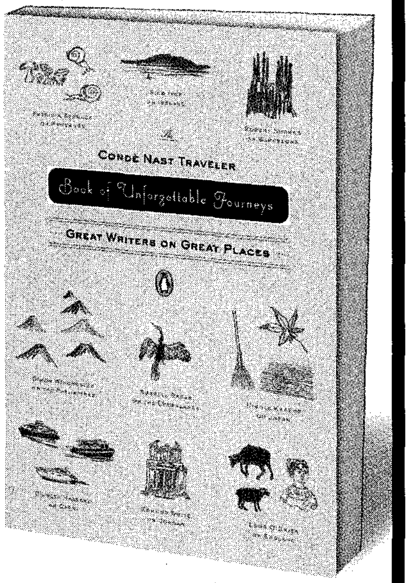

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Moreau, in the role of an unloved wife, walking through city streets in "La Notte" (1961), sun-hot buildings frowning down upon her. And so the paradoxes accrue: sex solves nothing for Antonioni, yet somehow his films, blending tactility with *froideur*, remain a tease and a turn-on, and, for someone insistent on human solitude, he was awfully skilled at handling group situations—look at the beach party in "The Girlfriends," or the search party climbing rocks in "L'Avventura." He was an urbanist, yet few can match his eye for landscape or his nose for weather. Just ask Woody Allen, who borrowed his cameraman, Carlo Di Palma, and asked him to reproduce, for "Radio Days," the same enveloping fog that he had conjured for Antonioni in "Identification of a Woman" (1982). In short, this great director, whose characters are said to be glazed with spiritual death, forged something intensely alive, as if celluloid were as strokable as skin. Think of Maria Schneider in "The Passenger" (1975), kneeling in the back seat of a speeding convertible, turning around, and revelling in the dappled, tree-bowered road that unspools behind her—what finer way to flee your past? Think even of Antonioni at his harshest, in "Red Desert" (1964), where a man attempts, yet again, to find common cause with a woman. "You wonder what to look at. I wonder how to live," he says. He pauses, then adds, "Same thing."

There is much in "Deep Water" that would have lured Antonioni: a secluded soul, a hostile sea, and a horror of what lies on land. This new documentary, directed by Louise Osmond and Jerry Rothwell, tells the story of Donald Crowhurst. He was an Englishman, born in India in 1932, and a pink-cheeked enthusiast, yet the images of him in "Deep Water" show something distant and dissatisfied in his gaze (not uncommon for those raised in the last gasp of imperial rule), and he came from a generation that kept its more potent feelings stowed safely away belowdecks. A weekend sailor, who ran an electrical company, he came to prominence in 1968, as one of a handful of men vying to complete the first single-handed non-stop circumnavigation of the world. Some contestants, like the eventual winner, Robin Knox-Johnston, set off well before the departure deadline of October 31st; Crowhurst left with just hours to spare. His wife and children came on board to say goodbye, but it was he who seemed like the child—a clever boy all at sea.

After less than a month, it became clear that Crowhurst's trimaran would not last the course. She was leaking, and he was bailing by hand. His pride would not let him quit, but he could scarcely press ahead: was there another solution? I will reveal no more, except to say that his mind was blown far more violently off course than his vessel. We have some idea of the maelstrom, because Crowhurst recorded his actions on cine-film, his words on audiotape, and his fathomless fears in a log. In its calm and expert way, "Deep Water" confirms all the mythical terrors that lurk in our dreams of the sea, and the best person to watch it with would be Melville. He would cry out for Crowhurst, and for the Frenchman Bernard Moitessier—a fellow-adventurer in the race, and worthy of a film unto himself. Like Crowhurst, he was driven to extremes, and his onboard footage of his daily tasks shows a creature of pure sinew and purpose, more like an anatomist's drawing of a man than like the real thing.

The first time I saw "Deep Water," the trace of mystery in the Crowhurst affair gave the movie a kick of excitement. On second viewing, with a queasy foreknowledge of what was to come, I found it intolerably sad. What had seemed a hearty feat of the gentleman amateur (he set sail in sweater and tie) was now drained of comic bathos, leaving Crowhurst stranded not as the victim of mishap but as someone swept toward a predictable destiny. For further proof, seek out the book "The Strange Last Voyage of Donald Crowhurst," by Nicholas Tomalin and Ron Hall, with its horrifying peek into Crowhurst's school reports, written in India decades before his journey. The eight-year-old boy was said to be good or fair at most subjects, but beside each report he wrote his own assessment: "Bad," "Very Bad," "Disgraceful," "Failed." ♦

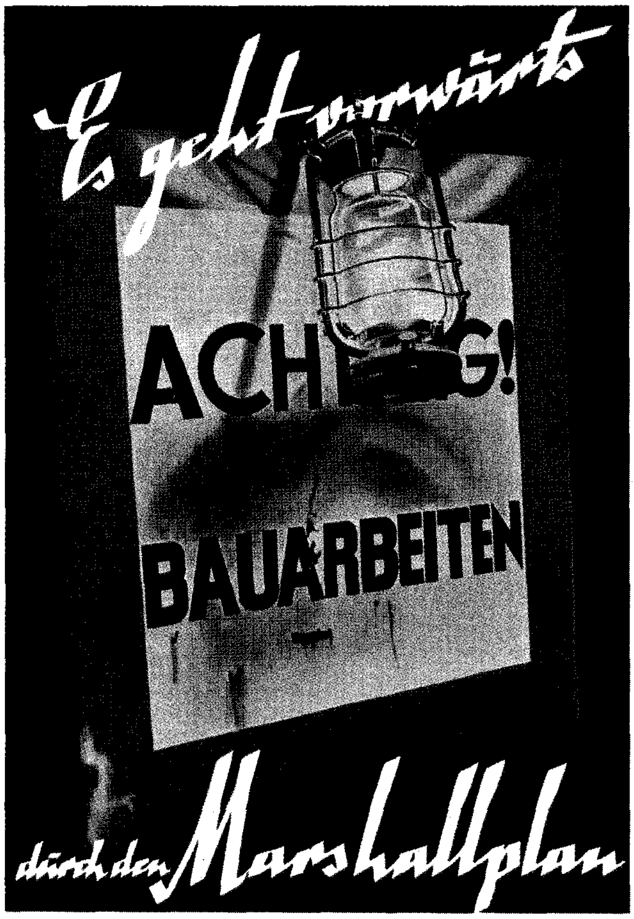
BOOKS

DOLLAR DIPLOMACY

How much did the Marshall Plan really matter?

BY NIALL FERGUSON

It was "the most generous act of any people, anytime, anywhere, to another people," its chief administrator declared. It was "among the most noble experiences in human affairs," its representative in Europe said. It was "the most staggering and portentous experiment in the entire history of our foreign policy," the young Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who served on its staff, wrote. Foreigners concurred. It was "like a lifeline to sinking men," according to the British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. It "saved us from catastrophe," a manager at Europe's largest tire factory declared. Sixty years after Secretary of State George C. Marshall outlined the need for economic aid to stimulate European recovery, in a speech at Harvard University's commencement on June 5, 1947, the plan named after him continues to be fondly remembered in donor and recipient countries alike. In our own time, liberal internationalists have periodically called for new Marshall Plans. After the collapse of Communism, some economists maintained that the former Soviet Union was in need of one. More recently, there has been desultory talk of Marshall Plans for Afghanistan, Iraq, and even the West Bank and Gaza. When critics lament the allegedly modest sums currently spent by the American government on foreign aid, they often draw an unfavorable contrast with the late nineteen-forties. Yet some people, at the time of its inception and since, have questioned both the Marshall Plan's motivation and its efficacy. Was it really so altruistic? And did it really avert a calamity?



A German poster from 1950 extols the benefits of American aid.

AKG-IMAGES

More popular history is written about war than about peace, and very little concerns itself with economics. Greg Behrman's "The Most Noble Adventure: The Marshall Plan and the Time When America Helped Save Europe" (Free Press; $27) is admirable for bringing to the potentially arid story of America's biggest aid program all the literary verve and drama one associates with the best military and diplomatic history. Behrman's approach recalls that of Margaret MacMillan in her recent book "Paris 1919," about the Paris Peace Conference after the First World War. Like "Paris 1919," "The Most Noble Adventure" is an account in which individual actors predominate over economic calculations. But, whereas MacMillan's book had few, if any, unalloyed heroes, Behrman's has a surfeit. I counted five.

There is Marshall himself, truly a titan among public servants. As Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army during the war, he had been, in Churchill's phrase, the "organizer of victory," and, as Secretary of State, he approached Europe's postwar reconstruction with the same sangfroid and self-discipline. There is William Clayton, the Under-Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, a Southerner who had made his fortune in cotton and his political reputation in wartime procurement. Clayton was another formidable workhorse, whose only weakness was his demanding wife, Sue, who hated his absence on government business and vetoed a succession of more senior appointments he was offered. (To crown it all, she divorced him a year after he retired, only to remarry the hapless fellow two months later.) A third hero is Arthur H. Vandenberg, a leading Republican in the Senate, who had been converted from isolationism to internationalism by the experience of war. Without him, Behrman suggests, the Marshall Plan might have been stymied by Republican opposition. The fourth member of Behrman's quintet is W. Averell Harriman, the imperious tycoon who, as Commerce Secretary, headed the President's Committee on Foreign Aid and then became the European Recovery Program's Special Representative in Europe. His contribution was to broker the diplomatic deals within Europe, whereby aid was subtly tied to other American objectives. Finally, there is Paul Hoffman, the indefatigable automobile salesman and president of Studebaker, whom Truman press-ganged into the job of Marshall Plan administrator. It was Hoffman, more than anyone else, who sold the Plan to Americans. (Richard Bissell, whom Hoffman summoned from M.I.T. to act as his chief economist, comes close to being a sixth hero—something of a rehabilitation for a figure now mostly recalled as one of the C.I.A. men behind the Bay of Pigs invasion.)

Flitting across this crowded stage

are some better-known figures: Harry Truman, who declined to call the program the "Truman Plan" not out of modesty but for fear of riling Republican opponents; Josef Stalin, whose aggressive action toward Czechoslovakia greatly helped Vandenberg to overcome congressional resistance; Ernest Bevin, the overweight, ebullient, and ineffably proletarian British Foreign Secretary, who was the Plan's biggest fan; and the diarist and wit Harold Nicolson, whose condescending characterization of the United States ("a giant with the limbs of an undergraduate, the emotions of a spinster, and the brain of a pea-hen") now reads like postimperial sour grapes. The United States in 1945 was a giant, all right, but with the wealth of a Harriman, the altruism of a Marshall, and the sheer dedication of men like Clayton, Vandenberg, Hoffman, and Bissell, it was surely a benign colossus.

What, exactly, was Marshall's plan? To answer that question, as Behrman's diligent research shows, we need to go back to the speech at Harvard. More than two years after the end of the Second World War in Europe, Marshall bluntly informed his audience that "the rehabilitation of the economic structure of Europe" would "require a much longer time and greater effort than had been foreseen." The division of labor between town and country was "threatened with breakdown" in Europe because "town and city industries are not producing adequate goods to exchange with the food-producing farmer." Consequently, European governments were obliged to import essentials from the United States, using precious hard-currency reserves that would be better spent on capital goods for reconstruction. Marshall declared:

> The truth of the matter is that Europe's requirements for the next three or four years of foreign food and other essential products—principally from America—are so much greater than her present ability to pay that she must have substantial additional help or face economic, social, and political deterioration of a very grave character.

The alternative to intervention was "hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos." The aim of the United States, then, should be to restore "the confidence of the European people in the economic future of their own countries and of Europe as a whole." But it was left up to the Europeans to decide whether or not to accept the offer of American aid and for what purposes they would like it to be used. "The initiative must come from Europe," Marshall stated. This new policy (Marshall himself did not use the word "plan") was "directed not against any country or doctrine." However, "any government which maneuvers to block the recovery of other countries" would be denied American assistance. And any political parties or groups that sought to "perpetuate human misery" for their own nefarious political purposes would "encounter the opposition of the United States."

Four things are especially striking about Marshall's speech, which he read (Behrman tells us) in a barely audible monotone from a seven-page typescript. The first is its economic premise: Europe urgently needed American aid so that urban consumers could be fed without exhausting hard-currency reserves, but the longer-term objective should be to restore European confidence, productivity, and self-sufficiency. The second is its disavowal of unilateralism: this was an invitation to Europeans to specify the help they needed. The third is the European scope of the speech: victors and vanquished were henceforth to be regarded as an integral unit. The fourth is Marshall's thinly veiled allusion to the Soviet Union and to Communism: anyone who opposed this new policy would get short shrift.

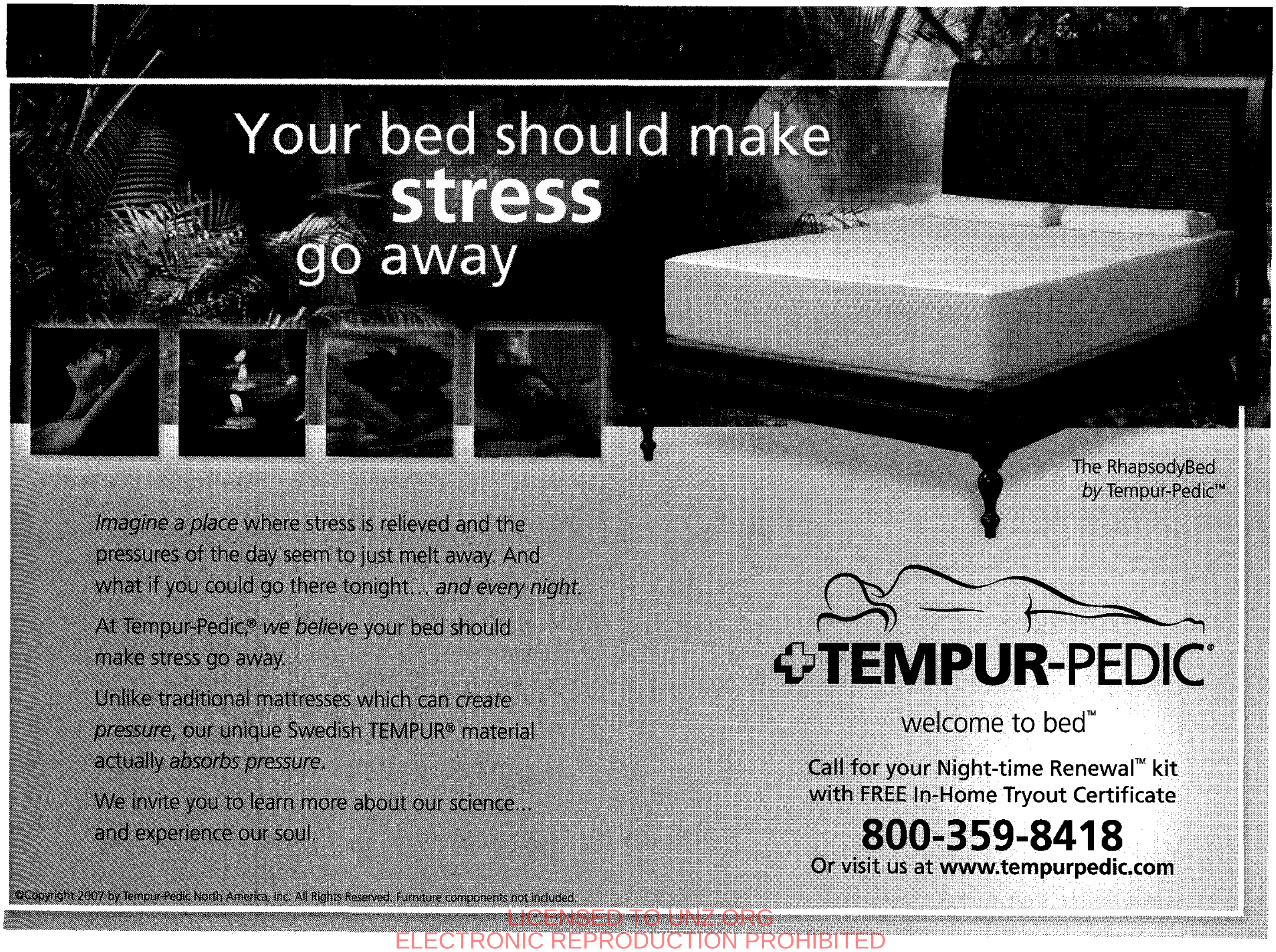
Even at the time, not everyone in the United States was convinced. "We are through being 'Uncle Sap,'" Senator Alexander Wiley, of Wisconsin, declared. To Senator Homer Capehart, of Indiana, the Marshall Plan was "state socialism." To congressman Frederick Smith, of Ohio, it was "outright communism." Not to be outdone, Senator Joseph McCarthy, of Wisconsin, later called it a "massive and unrewarding boondoggle" that had turned the United States into "the patsy of the modern world." The very fact of McCarthy's denunciation could be taken as a powerful argument in the Plan's favor, and it is tempting, at this distance, to see such critics as blinkered isolationists, partisan hacks, or incurable xenophobes. But a significant number of eminent economic historians—notably, the British scholar Alan Milward—have questioned just how vital Marshall Aid really was for Europe's postwar recovery. According to Milward, recovery was under way well before the advent of the Marshall Plan, and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure was far advanced before the funds reached Europe. The program was also too small to have a significant effect on Europe's capital stock. The total aid package was equivalent to less than three per cent of the recipient countries' combined national income, and it represented less than a fifth of their gross investment.

To gauge the true importance of the Marshall Plan, it is crucial to get a sense of the amounts involved. Behrman writes, "From June 1947 to its termination at the end of 1951, the Marshall Plan provided approximately $13 billion to finance the recovery . . . of Western Europe." This was less than half the Europeans' initial request and four billion dollars less than President Truman's initial proposal to Congress, but it was still serious money. Behrman computes that, in today's dollars, "that sum equals roughly $100 billion, and as a comparable share of U.S. Gross National Product it would be in excess of $500 billion." That's actually an understatement. In fact, the total amount disbursed under the Marshall Plan was equivalent to roughly 5.4 per cent of U.S. gross national product in the year of Marshall's speech, or 1.1 per cent spread over the whole period of the program, which, technically, dated from April, 1948, when the Foreign Assistance Act was passed, to June, 1952, when the last payment was made. A Marshall Plan announced today would therefore be worth closer to seven hundred and forty billion dollars. If there had been a Marshall Plan between 2003 and 2007, it would have cost five hundred and fifty billion. By comparison, actual foreign economic aid under the Bush Administration between 2001 and 2006 totalled less than one hundred and fifty billion, an average of less than 0.2 per cent of G.D.P.

Yet even these calculations understate the magnitude of the Marshall Plan. There had been American economic assistance to Europe before, through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, which spent about $2.5 billion, and ad-hoc measures like the loan of $3.75 billion to Britain that was negotiated in 1946. But none of these expedients addressed the fundamental problem of the "dollar gap"—the fact that an exhausted Europe could not earn the foreign exchange it needed to pay for indispensable U.S. imports. As Behrman demonstrates, Marshall Aid solved this problem. A French farmer who needed an American-manufactured tractor would buy it with French francs. The Economic Cooperation Administration (the Plan's executive arm) would then vet the transaction in consultation with the French government. If it was approved, the U.S. tractor manufacturer would be paid out of Marshall Plan funds. The French farmer's francs, meanwhile, would go to the French central bank, enabling the French government to spend the money on reconstruction. Marshall Aid thus did "double duty," relieving the pressure on the French balance of payments while at the same time channelling money into the French government's own recovery plan. It thereby had a "multiplier effect," a term borrowed from John Maynard Keynes. According to one contemporary, each dollar of Marshall cash stimulated four to six dollars' worth of additional European production.

This positive reassessment echoes the argument advanced in the early nineties by Brad DeLong and Barry Eichengreen (in an article that is absent from Behrman's bibliography). Marshall Aid was indeed vital, but more in terms of political economy than macroeconomics. It helped get the European economies through a balance-of-payments crisis, to be sure. More important, though, it helped European governments balance budgets and reduce inflation. It forced them to shift from wartime controls to free-market mechanisms. And it played an important part in moving Europe from a dysfunctional system of labor relations based on strike action and class conflict to one based on wage restraint and productivity growth. In all of this, the Marshall Plan resembled the "structural adjustment programs" the International Monetary Fund imposed on borrowers in the developing world during the nineties, but on a larger scale and with much better public relations. As Marshall had foreseen, tackling the food bottleneck was beneficial both materially and psychologically. One Dutch baker displayed a sign that read, "More than half of your daily bread is baked with Marshall wheat." Wherever the red-white-and-blue Marshall shield could be seen, its motto resonated: "For European Recovery: Supplied by the United States of America." The most important strings attached to such supplies were the ones tying Europe to the new American model of managerial capitalism.

Behrman goes still further, how-



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ever. He also sees the Marshall Plan as having been instrumental to the process of European economic integration, presaging today's European Union in the Organization for European Economic Cooperation. And he accepts the claim that the Marshall Plan defused potentially revolutionary situations in Western Europe and helped prevent a Communist tide from engulfing West Berlin, Italy, and perhaps even France. He has no interest in the once fashionable arguments of Cold War revisionists that the Plan was—in the memorable phrase of Stalin's economic adviser Yevgeny Varga—"a dagger pointed at Moscow." If the Soviets chose to decline Marshall Aid for themselves and their clients, more fools they. The notion that Marshall and his colleagues aimed at "economic and political subjugation of European countries to American capital," to quote another Soviet source, is presented as unworthy of serious consideration.

This is a timely book, reminding us of the good things that the United States has achieved within living memory. Not for nothing do economists call aid payments "unrequited transfers." It is also useful to recall just how poisonously partisan Washington was after 1947, as Joseph McCarthy's witch hunt gathered momentum. This was no golden age of cross-party consensus. Yet there is a need for caution. Historians have a duty to immerse themselves in contemporary testimony, as Behrman has clearly done. But they must also beware of uncritically accepting contemporary judgments.

One way of avoiding this is to pose counterfactual questions. "What would it cost not to aid Europe?" one congressman asked. That remains the key question. If there had been no Marshall Plan, would Western Europe's economies have failed to recover from the postwar crisis? It would seem not (though there would probably have been more currency volatility and more labor unrest). Under the Marshall Plan, grants and loans were received by sixteen different countries. Britain received more than twice the amount given to West Germany. Yet no European economy performed more dismally in the postwar period than Britain's. A crucial difference between the two was the success of the German currency reform of 1948, which saw the birth of the enormously successful Deutsche Mark, compared with the ephemeral stimulus of the British devaluation of 1949, the first of several vain attempts to revive the U.K. economy by cheapening exports.

If there had been no Marshall Plan, would Western Europe have remained economically fragmented? No, because the Europeans did not need America to come up with their own plan for a six-nation Coal and Steel Community, the decisive first step toward economic integration. By comparison, the American-sponsored O.E.E.C. was a cul-de-sac. Notice, too, that among the recipients of Marshall Aid were a number of countries that even today remain outside the European Union: Iceland, Norway, and Turkey. And no amount of American pressure could persuade the British to participate in the first wave of European integration. As one British official complained, "We are being asked to join the Germans, who started two world wars, the French, who had in 1940 collapsed in the face of German aggression, the Italians, who changed sides, and the Low Countries, of whom not much was known but who seemed to have put up little resistance to Germany."

If there had been no Marshall Plan, would American industry have enjoyed less access to European markets? Again, no: European recovery did not especially benefit American manufacturers, for whom domestic markets were vastly more important. In 1953, Britain still accounted for only 5.2 per cent of U.S. exports and Germany for just 2.3 per cent. As a whole, exports represented a modest share of U.S. G.D.P.—about three per cent even at the end of the nineteen-fifties, compared with roughly seven per cent today. Similarly, the French Communist paper *L'Humanité* exaggerated the threat of "Coca-colonization" of Europe by American capital. In fact, the volume of U.S. direct investment in Europe was relatively modest in the years following 1947.

Finally, if there had been no Marshall Plan, would Stalin have brought some or all of Western Europe into the Soviet imperium? Again, no; the principal deterrent to Stalin was not American dollars but American firepower. By the time the Plan had run its course, soft power was increasingly yielding to hard power in the struggle between the superpowers, particularly after the Soviet-sponsored North Korean invasion of South Korea. True, some Marshall Plan funds were channelled into the C.I.A.'s Office of Policy Coordination (a euphemism for covert operations). But these amounts were trivial compared with the sums being spent on more overt methods of containment. Ultimately, the North Atlantic Treaty mattered more than the Marshall Plan in checking the Soviet advance.

In all likelihood, then, Western Europe could have pulled through without the Marshall Plan. But it certainly could not have pulled through without the United States. At the time that Marshall made his speech in Harvard Yard, no one could be sure that all would turn out for the best in postwar Western Europe. No one could even be sure that the United States would deliver on Marshall's pledge. All people could remember was the sad sequence of events that had followed the previous World War, when Western Europe was swept by general strikes and galloping inflation, while the United States Senate reneged on Woodrow Wilson's "plan" for a new order based on collective security. The Marshall Plan was not the only difference between the two postwar eras, but, to West Europeans struggling to make ends meet, it was the most visible manifestation of American good will—and a mirror image of the Soviet policy of mulcting Eastern Europe. This, more than its macroeconomic impact, explains its endurance in the popular imagination. At a time when, according to the Pew Research Center, only thirty-nine per cent of Frenchmen and thirty per cent of Germans have a positive view of the United States, that is something worth remembering, and pondering. ♦

BOOKS

AVENGING ANGEL

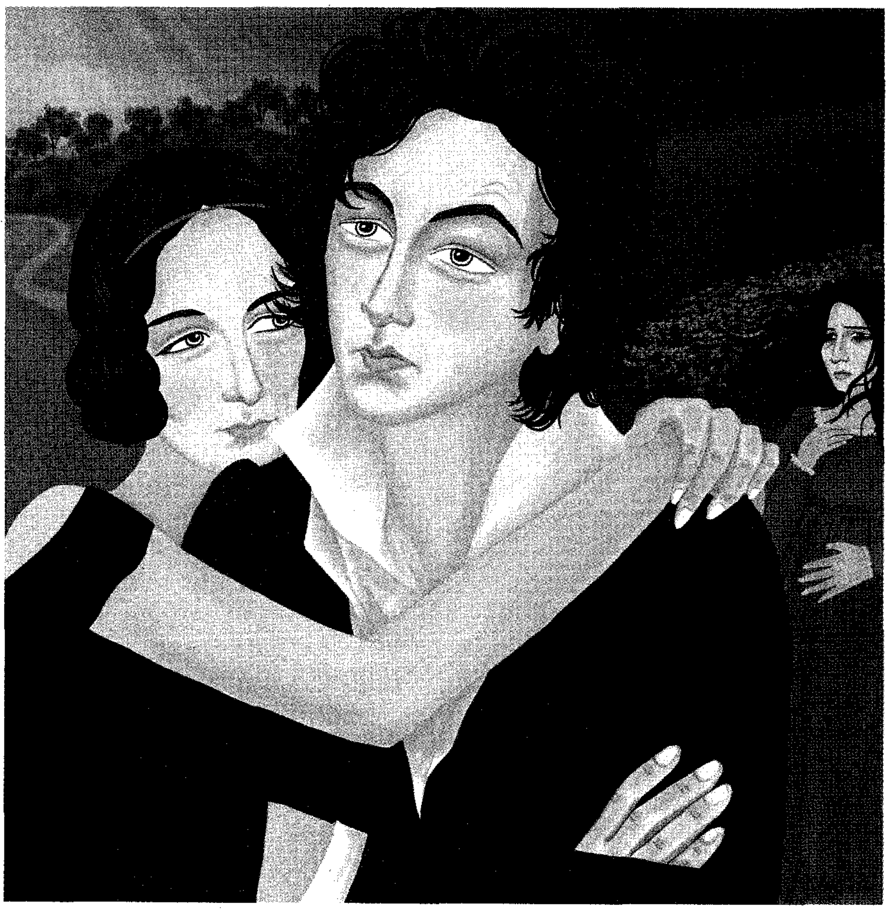
Inside Shelley's Manichaean mind.

BY ADAM KIRSCH

In the summer of 1812, as the half million soldiers of the Grande Armée marched across Europe in Napoleon's doomed Russian campaign, a nineteen-year-old in the Devonshire village of Lynmouth set out to change the history of Europe all on his own. Anyone strolling along the beach at Lynmouth that summer, around sunrise or sunset, might have caught him at his epochal work, which to the casual eye would have looked like a boy's game. He knelt down by the water and launched toy boats, waterproofed with wax and equipped with masts made of sticks, into the Bristol Channel; he launched handmade hot-air balloons, their silk canopies inflating and floating away toward Wales and Ireland.

To Percy Bysshe Shelley, however, these fragile devices were as dangerous to the established order as Napoleon's grapeshot. Each one contained a copy of "A Declaration of Rights," a manifesto that set out Shelley's radical creed in thirty-one propositions. "Government has no rights," he announced. "All have a right to an equal share in the benefits and burdens of government"; "A Christian, a Deist, a Turk, and a Jew, have equal rights." It was Shelley's version of the declarations that had launched the American and French Revolutions, and he saw no reason that his work—though the product of a single ardent mind, instead of a Congress or an Assembly—shouldn't have equally momentous results. Weren't poets, as he would write almost a decade later, the unacknowledged legislators of the world?

The image of Shelley entrusting his words to the elements captures both the admirable and the questionable sides of his tumultuous career. Shelley's certainty that his messages would reach their rightful audience, despite the odds, expresses his faith that justice is radiantly simple. He wrote the "Declaration" in the same spirit, sure that if the world could be made to see the truth, as clearly and passionately as he saw it, all selfishness would disappear. Like Jesus, whom he blasphemed, admired, and at times resembled, Shelley would take no thought for the morrow. He stood to lose personally from the social revolution he preached. As the son of a country squire, he was due to inherit an estate, a title, and a fortune; but he didn't hesitate to renounce them all for the sake of his ideals. During his first year at Oxford, he published an essay, "The Necessity of Atheism," and sent it to the university's leading officials, practically begging to be expelled. When he was, to the horror of his well-meaning, conventional father, Shelley made things worse by eloping with a sixteen-year-old girl, Harriet Westbrook. Cut off by his family, he was reduced to scraping by on small loans, but he remained impulsively generous to friends, and even to strangers.

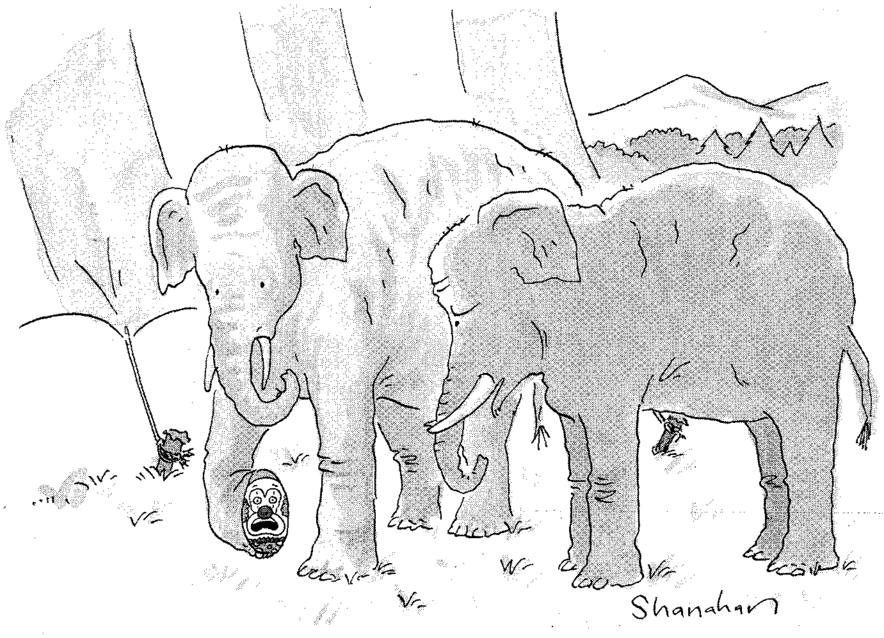


Shelley's radical ideals were inseparable from a kind of moral arrogance.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

Unlike the average radical, then, Shelley didn't just challenge social taboos; he openly violated them, living his personal life in accordance with unpopular principles like equality, women's rights, and free love. As a result, he became so reviled in England that he had to emigrate, spending the last four years of his life in Italy. Such unworldliness helps to explain why Shelley's closest friends remembered him as a kind of saint or angel. To Thomas Hogg, whom he met at Oxford, "he was a pure spirit, in the Divine likeness of the Archangel Gabriel; the peace-breathing, lily-bearing Annunciator."

At the same time, there is something exasperating, or worse, about the idea of Shelley trying to change the world with toy balloons. Throughout his adulthood, he considered himself a serious radical—even claiming, "I consider poetry very



"I knew I smelled something funny."

• •

subordinate to moral and political science"—whose purpose in life was to advance the cause of liberty in England and Europe. But he consistently displayed an indifference to reality which went deeper than his propaganda techniques. Shelley's ineffectiveness as an agitator we could dismiss with a smile. But his political beliefs demonstrated the same contempt of consequence, the same elevation of pure motive over practical effects, the same lack of self-awareness. These qualities helped to make Shelley a genuinely illiberal thinker, whose politics verged at times on the totalitarian.

Because his poetry is deeply political, it is impossible to separate Shelley's abstract ideas from his sensuous, passionate poems. And because he believed, as much as any revolutionary of the nineteen-sixties, that the personal is political, it is equally hard to separate his art from his biography. That is why, during his lifetime and ever since, Shelley's private life, his politics, and his poetry have presented readers with a single, inextricable problem. "And did you once see Shelley plain?" Robert Browning wrote; the line is famous because nobody ever has.

"Being Shelley" (Pantheon; $30), by Ann Wroe, does not even try to see Shelley plain. Instead, as the title suggests, Wroe tries to see as Shelley saw—to inhabit his consciousness and capture its every movement. This is, as she frankly says, "an experiment," and any reader who opens the book expecting a conventional biography is in for a surprise. While Wroe offers some basic biographical information and quotes copiously from Shelley's writings, she does not tell a chronological story or analyze individual poems. Instead, like an alchemist at the cauldron, she volatilizes Shelley's life and work into their basic elements: her book is divided into sections titled "Earth," "Water," "Air," and "Fire."

The book is more an act of mediumship than a work of biography, and it depends for its success on the fineness of Wroe's intuition and the intensity of her identification with her subject. Fortunately, Wroe seems to have Shelley's entire life and work spread out before her in a mental map, allowing her to draw some unexpected connections. Shelley's language is kneaded so deeply into her own that some familiarity with the poems is required to recognize all her allusions. "If others thought him 'a blot,' he was a bright one," she writes, subtly quoting Shelley's sonnet "Lift not the painted veil": "through the unheeding many he did move, / A splendour among shadows, a bright blot / Upon this gloomy scene." At times, Wroe shifts from narrative to fuguelike lists of images. "Water could not be counted his friend," begins one such catalogue, which goes on to show us Shelley being baptized in 1792, getting caught in a rainstorm in 1814, and sketching raindrops in his notebooks, which are themselves smeared with seawater. All the while, Wroe, who assumes some prior knowledge of the Shelley myth, also means us to remember how the poet died. In 1822, just a month before his thirtieth birthday, he drowned off the Italian coast near Livorno, having insisted on launching a small boat even though a storm was brewing.

Wroe's free-associative method would not get very far with most poets, perhaps. But it is well suited to Shelley, whose poems return again and again, as it were compulsively, to a few primal scenes and images. A boat travelling down a river under a canopy of leaves; a deep, narrow cave in the mountains or by the water; the play of light on the sea—these images seem to bubble up into Shelley's consciousness from some mysterious elsewhere, much as the landscape of "Kubla Khan" came to Coleridge in a dream. To W. B. Yeats, Shelley's use of such archetypes was proof that he had access to "some great memory that renews the world and men's thoughts age after age." Shelley, Yeats was sure, was "what people call 'psychic.'"

The whole repertoire of Shelley's archetypes, psychic or otherwise, is on display in "Alastor," his first major poem, written in 1815, when he was twenty-three. It recounts the visionary quest of a Poet—with an unapologetic capital "P"—who travels the East in search of a woman he once saw in a dream. This "veiled maid" is an embodiment of "Knowledge and truth and virtue." But it is characteristic of Shelley that she is also a sexual being, and that her visitation takes the form of what we would now call a wet dream. The movement of Shelley's verse imitates the rhythm of orgasm in a way that still feels startling:

> He reared his shuddering limbs, and quelled
> His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet
> Her panting bosom; . . . she drew back a while,
> Then, yielding to the irresistible joy,
> With frantic gesture and short breathless cry
> Folded his frame in her dissolving arms.

When the Poet wakes up, he realizes that he cannot live without seeing the maid again. But this need to pursue "Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade," to find the Infinite in the real world, seals his doom. The rest of the poem is a deliquescent series of landscapes and waterscapes, as the Poet pilots his "little shallop" down a river that is nominally in the Caucasus. But no map can point the way to "the shifting domes of sheeted spray/That canopied his path o'er the waste deep," the "pyramids/Of the tall cedar overarching," the "Islanded seas, blue mountains, mighty streams,/Dim tracts and vast, robed in the lustrous gloom/Of leaden-coloured even," which the Poet discovers. "Thou imagest my life," he declares to the river, and the scenes he passes through "Have each their type in me." Inevitably, this passage through the landscape of his mind can end only in death.

Shelley's dreamlike language and sensuous imagery made him one of the favorite poets of the prudish Victorian age, once his sexual radicalism had receded into legend. But this popularity was founded principally on such short lyrics as "To a Skylark" or "Mont Blanc," whose descriptions of nature can be more easily detached from politics. Today, it is Shelley's longer, stranger, more aggressively philosophical poems—some of them flawed and incomplete—that seem to represent the core of his achievement. During the poet's Italian sojourn, masterpieces came in a steady stream. In four years, he produced the mythic drama "Prometheus Unbound," which began as a translation of Aeschylus and became an apocalyptic allegory of revolution; "The Cenci," an homage to the Jacobean drama, in which a father's rape of his daughter becomes a symbol of patriarchal tyranny; "Adonais," an ode on the death of Keats, which turns the poet into a martyr, slain by an unfeeling world; "Hellas," a piece of propaganda for the Greek revolution against the Turks; and "The Masque of Anarchy," a joyous libel of England's ruling statesmen. As Shelley got older, his political vision grew broader and deeper, until the revolution he imagined was less a change of regime than a renovation of humanity itself. And this far more radical dream, nearly religious in its scope and intensity, is at the heart of his greatest poems.

Shelley's uncanny power lies in his gift for projecting his deepest fears and longings onto a hallucinatory cosmos. In his highest and most Shelleyan moments, the suggestive richness of his language, along with his ecstatic rhythms, allows him to abolish the distinction between himself and the world. In his essay "A Defence of Poetry," when he claims and possibly believes that he is describing the effect of Bacon's prose, he is actually talking about his own verse: "it is a strain which distends and then bursts the circumference of the hearer's mind and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which it has perpetual sympathy."

That bursting and pouring reaches its highest pitch in "Ode to the West Wind." Wroe makes much use of Shelley's notebooks, which are preserved at Oxford and the Huntington Library, to evoke his inner world. Sometimes her interpretations of the poet's drafts and doodles feel arbitrary, or else overdetermined, as when she sees his handwriting, in a passage about weeping, as "digging and jerking as if in paroxysms of tears." But she finds something genuinely revelatory in the drafts of the "Ode," which Shelley wrote on the afternoon of October 25, 1819, in a wood near the Arno in Florence. In trying to define the exact relation between himself and the wind—which he imagines as the "Destroyer and Preserver" of the universe—Shelley made several false starts. "Be thy," "Be thou through," "in me," "to the," he writes, crossing out the words each time. Finally, he lights on the famous, thrilling lines: "Be thou, spirit fierce,/My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!" No prepositions can separate the poet from the world: the two must be not just identified but identical. That is the impossible ambition of Shelley's poetry, which at moments he seems to make possible through the power of his language.

Yet it is also a Luciferian ambition, which aims to violate some essential order of the world and of the human mind. "He overleaps the bounds," Shelley writes of the Poet in "Alastor," and his own poetry lives in a perpetual overreaching. He was well aware that this could be considered a species of pride, and he took a mischievous pleasure in identifying himself with the great villain of pride in English literature, Milton's Satan. The last line of his "Declaration of Rights" reads, "Awake!—arise!—or be for ever fallen"; there is no attribution, but Shelley hoped that his audience would recognize the words with which Satan rallies the fallen angels in the first book of "Paradise Lost." In "Julian and Maddalo," Shelley portrays himself and Lord Byron—thinly disguised as the title characters—in conversation, "forlorn,/Yet pleasing such as once, so poets tell,/The devils held within the dales of Hell,/Concerning God, freewill and destiny." He even wrote an "Essay on the Devil and Devils," in which he argued that "Milton's Devil as a moral being" was "far superior to his God."

Wroe tries to explain Shelley's interest in the Devil, and in all kinds of demons and ghosts, by invoking another of her book's many avatars, "Monster-Shelley"—the side of him that enjoyed reading tales of horror, and liked to scare himself and other people with hideous visions. She even suggests that his vaunted atheism was just another kind of thrill-seeking: "As a devil-figure he was interesting, but not uncommon. He could do much worse, scaring the custom-bound much more thoroughly. Monster-Shelley therefore took the title 'Atheist' and blazoned it on his forehead." This assumption doesn't do justice to the earnestness and importance of Shelley's radical commitments—although it is true that there was an element of performance in his atheism, especially at first. His letters just before he was expelled from Oxford, a martyr to the atheist creed, are filled with Voltairean bravado: "Oh! how I wish I were the avenger!—that it were mine to crush the demon; to hurl him to his native hell, never to rise again, and thus to establish for ever perfect and universal toleration." The sentence is comic in its tonal paradox—the prophet of toleration thundering like a Spanish Inquisitor—and doubly so thanks to Shelley's failure to recognize the comedy. To Matthew Arnold, indeed, it was this "utter deficiency in humor" that was Shelley's "disastrous want and weakness." Arnold did not simply mean that Shelley couldn't tell a joke but, more fundamentally, that he could not step outside himself and look impartially at his own weaknesses, limitations, and failures. Like many adolescents, but few adults, he did not really believe that he had any.

To his contemporaries, the signal example of Shelley's moral arrogance was his treatment of his first wife. When Harriet Westbrook, in rebellion against her father and her school, begged Shelley to rescue her, it was the kind of cause that he found hard to resist. He agreed to elope with a girl he had never considered more than a friend. "If I know anything about love, I am not in love," he had written just weeks before the marriage. He loved the idea of getting married even less: "A kind of ineffable, sickening disgust seizes my mind when I think of this most despotic, most unrequired fetter." But he recognized that living together out of wedlock would hurt Harriet's reputation much more than his own, and he agreed to go through with the ceremony.

Things worked well enough for two and a half years, as Shelley enlisted Harriet in his political activities and taught her to parrot his catchphrases. She helped to distribute his youthful tracts but seems to have regarded the activity as little more than a lark. "We throw them out of the window and give them to men that we pass in the streets; for myself I am ready to die of laughter when it is done and Percy looks so grave," she wrote in a letter. They had already started to grow apart when, in the summer of 1814, Shelley fell in love with Mary Godwin. Mary was then sixteen, the same age that Harriet had been when Shelley married her, and she had intellectual gifts that Harriet could never match. Just as important was her intellectual pedigree: she was the daughter of William Godwin, a radical thinker whom Shelley worshipped, and Mary Wollstonecraft, the crusader for women's rights. Add the fact that Mary was instantly smitten with Shelley—it seems that they had sex for the first time by her mother's grave, to mark their spiritual union—and Harriet never really had a chance.

The lovers ran off to Europe, taking with them Mary's half sister, Jane Clairmont. Harriet, pregnant with Shelley's second child, was left behind to face scandal and ostracism. Today, it is hardly tempting to add to the chorus of moral indignation that pursued Shelley across Europe and beyond the grave. To marry someone you do not love, and then leave her for someone you do, does not look like a crime under our more liberal sexual dispensation. The truly disturbing aspect of Shelley's behavior was his self-justifying refusal to acknowledge Harriet's distress. According to his free-love principles, marriage should not be a permanent, exclusive arrangement; for a man to love different women at different times (and vice versa) was only natural. A heart that loved only one object would build, he wrote in "Epipsychidion," "a sepulchre for its eternity." And, because he was sure that his principles were correct, he could not help deducing that his actions were justified. With complete sincerity, he invited Harriet to come to Switzerland and live with him as his sister, while Mary would take over the role of wife. Then Shelley explained that he himself—the man who had just abandoned her—was Harriet's one "firm and constant friend," the only person in the world "by whom your feelings will never wilfully be injured. From none can you expect this but me—all else are either unfeeling or selfish."

The inhumanity of Shelley's attitude was made even clearer a year and a half later, when Harriet—cut off from her husband, raising Shelley's two children, and pregnant by another man—drowned herself in the Serpentine, in London. Shelley, again, knew that it could not be his fault. "Everything tends to prove," he wrote to Mary after hearing the news, "that beyond the shock of so hideous a catastrophe having fallen on a human being once so nearly connected with me, there would in any case have been little to regret." It is not entirely clear whether the thing that Shelley does not regret is Harriet's death or merely his own conduct, but the words are chilling. In the months that followed, Shelley embarked on a highly self-righteous legal battle with Harriet's father for custody of the children he had abandoned. When the ruling came down against him, he felt personally victimized by the Lord Chancellor.

As always with Shelley, the personal had a political aspect. His unshakable faith in his own goodness carried over into his thought, and even his poetry, to dangerous effect. Shelley considered himself a true philanthropist, and was willing to give his time and money to any good cause. But he had an enormous capacity for hatred, especially political hatred. Perhaps Lord Castlereagh, Britain's Foreign Secretary, deserved Shelley's indelible attack in "The Masque of Anarchy": "I met Murder on the way—/He had a mask like Castlereagh." Shelley's conviction that all authority figures were tyrants applied not just to unpopular politicians but to priests, schoolmasters, and even parents. In 1811, he inveighed, again without the shadow of a smile, against the oppression visited on Harriet, with whom he had just eloped: "Her father has persecuted her in a most horrible way, by endeavouring to compel her to go to school."

Quite simply, Shelley believed that anyone who disagreed with him was depraved at heart. As a result, his political vision was essentially Manichaean: "The Manichaean philosophy respecting the origin and government of the world, if not true, is at least an hypothesis conformable to the experience of actual facts," he wrote. Mankind was made miserable by the willful selfishness of tyrants and priests. And the millennium, in Shelley's limitless, idealizing vision, was not just a matter of universal suffrage. In "Prometheus Unbound," he imagines it as a time when the mountains of the moon turn into "living fountains," "ugly human shapes and visages" grow "mild and lovely," and it becomes "the pain of bliss/To move, to breathe, to be."

With so much at stake, wouldn't it be justified to kill the handful of wicked men who stood between humanity and its golden age? This was precisely the logic of the Terrorists during the French Revolution; and Shelley, though he often deplored the excesses of Jacobinism, never began to understand the perils of its utopian vision, or his own. In "The Assassins," an unfinished story written in 1814, he imagined a quasi-Jacobin community that would kill the world's oppressors as unhesitatingly as it would kill poisonous snakes: "And if the poisoner has assumed a human shape, if the bane be distinguished only from the viper's venom by the excess and extent of its devastation will the savior and avenger here retract and pause entrenched behind the superstition of the indefeasible divinity of man?"

"The Assassins" was a juvenile work,

and most of the time Shelley went out of his way to insist that the revolution he desired must be nonviolent. He advocated a form of passive resistance, even in the wake of the Peterloo massacre of 1819, when cavalry charged at a demonstration on the outskirts of Manchester, killing eleven people: "And if then the tyrants dare,/Let them ride among you there,/Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew—/What they like, that let them do." But these pragmatic caveats remained on the surface. In the depths of his imagination, where his poetry was born, he remained vengefully Manichaean. In "Adonais," he seems to suggest that the right-wing reviewers who panned Keats's "Endymion" actually did not have souls. While the dead poet's "pure spirit" will become "a portion of the Eternal," he writes, their "cold embers" will "choke the sordid hearth of shame."

Shelley, who frequently quoted the Platonic injunction "Know thyself," never knew himself well enough to acknowledge the intolerance and self-righteousness that went hand in hand with his sublime egotism. Instead, exiled in Italy with few friends or readers, he indulged in the voluptuous self-pity that animates so many of his poems. In his own eyes, he was always misunderstood by the world, like the lonely creature he wrote about in "The Sensitive Plant": "But none ever trembled and panted with bliss/In the garden, the field, or the wilderness,/Like a doe in the noon-tide with love's sweet want,/As the companionless Sensitive Plant."

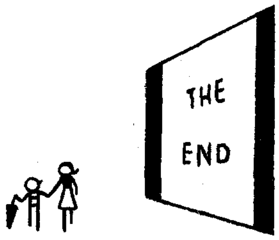
The most important limitation of Wroe's method is that it leaves her with as little critical perspective on Shelley as Shelley had himself. Being Shelley means feeling as Shelley felt, and Wroe tremblingly recapitulates the poet's sense of being too fragile for this world: "Rain punished Shelley, too. He stood in it, his heart naked to its freezing, battering drops." By the time he drowns, Wroe's Shelley has become literally angelic, ready to return to his heavenly home: "White wings unfolded vastly from his shoulders, as if through this battering frenzy he could rise to the upper sky." But, if there is one lesson to be drawn from Shelley's life and work, it is that you can't trust a man who believes he is an angel. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Small Presses

African Psycho, *by Alain Mabanckou, translated from the French by Christine Schwartz Hartley (Soft Skull; $13.95).* "No gesture is as simple as that of bringing someone's life to an end," the narrator declares at the start of this disturbing—and disturbingly funny—novel, the first to appear in English by Mabanckou, a French writer of Congolese descent. In an unnamed African country, the impoverished narrator prowls the streets of a blighted neighborhood called He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-an-Idiot, owing to its abundance of saloons and "drunkenness contests." He fancies himself the heir of a notorious local serial killer, whose sadistic attacks on the rich and powerful he recounts in gruesome and loving detail, but he's too neurotic to actually commit murder, endlessly debating the pros and cons of knives and guns. Although the title invokes "American Psycho," the book owes more to Dostoyevsky and Camus, as the narrator broods and dithers, longing to "exist at last."

Dog War, *by Anthony C. Winkler (Akashic; $14.95).* A Jamaican of Lebanese and Hungarian extraction, Winkler is best known for his satirical novel of Caribbean life "The Lunatic." Here he applies his wicked sensibility to immigrant experience in Florida. Newly widowed, Precious, an upstanding Jamaican with practical ideas and a conversational relationship with Jesus, becomes a maid in a Miami mansion for a pampered dog, who soon develops over-fond feelings for her person. The dog belongs to the spiritually questing Mistress Lucy, a multimillionaire among whose most pressing concerns is whether to have her Rolls "decowed"—the leather removed on moral grounds. Winkler has a fine ear for patois and dialogue, and a love of language that makes bawdy jokes crackle.



Phantom Shanghai, *by Greg Girard (Magenta Foundation; $50).* For decades after the Communist victory, in 1949, Shanghai remained largely intact, preserved by benign neglect, its architecture a rich legacy of the polyglot collision of Asian and Western cultures that formed the city. Since the nineties, however, Shanghai's metamorphosis into a towering megacity has been an ineluctable and pitiless process of paving over nearly all previous traces—a phenomenon stunningly documented in Greg Girard's garish, poetic, infinitely sad photographs. In an indignant introduction, William Gibson calls them "Documents of the Gone World." Seeming to have arrived in each case minutes before the bulldozers, Girard shows us here a pair of stone lions sitting amid the rubble of a condemned factory, there a gorgeous mansion in the old French concession, long ago subdivided for worker housing, and last occupied by members of the very crew charged with knocking it down.

Butchery on Bond Street, *by Benjamin Feldman (Green-Wood Cemetery Historic Fund/New York Wanderer Press; $24.95).* In January, 1857, Harvey Burdell, a dentist with a taste for lowlife, was found stabbed to death in his quarters, on Bond Street, igniting one of the most famous murder scandals in New York City's history. Suspicion immediately fell upon Burdell's mistress (and landlady), Emma Cunningham, with whom he had been arguing violently over his ongoing refusal to marry her. The newspapers covered the case in salacious detail, and, at Cunningham's trial, more than twelve times the usual number of prospective jurors were summoned, so that the case could be heard without prejudice. Feldman collates popular accounts with archival research—the coroner, he finds, brought witnesses to the murder site and interrogated them in Burdell's dentist's chair—and tells the story like a gaslight-era episode of "Law & Order."

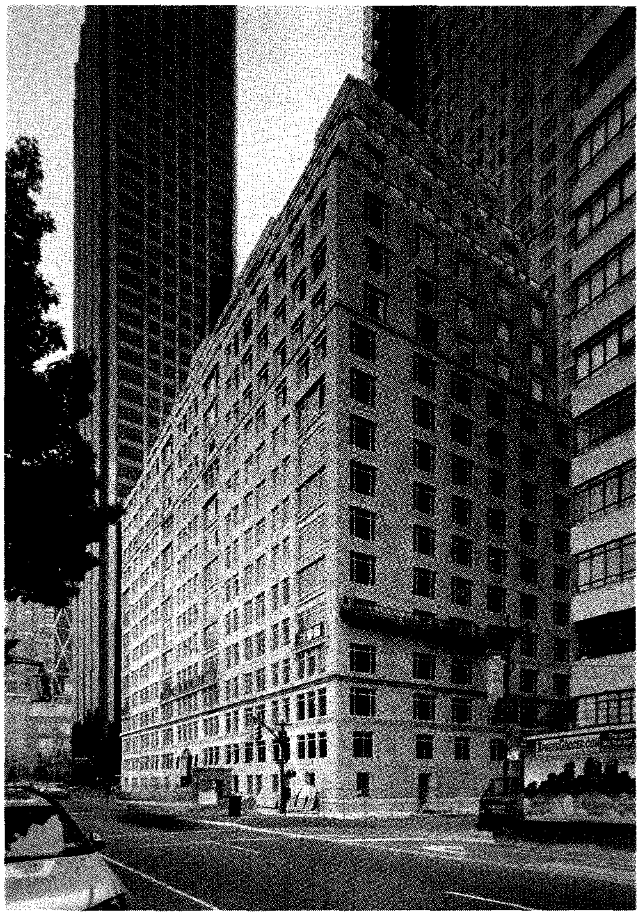
THE SKY LINE

PAST PERFECT

Retro opulence on Central Park West.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

In an essay titled "The Plight of the Prosperous," published in 1950 in this magazine, Lewis Mumford dismissed the living accommodations of upscale New Yorkers as little better than slums. "I sometimes wonder what self-hypnosis has led the well-to-do citizens of New York, for the last seventy-five years, to accept the quarters that are offered them with the idea that they are doing well by themselves," he wrote. The typical Upper East Side apartment, he said, was dark, airless, and badly laid out. Mumford was mostly right, but, by the time he was writing, design and construction standards were heading downhill so fast that the prewar buildings he was sneering at had come to evoke the grand living of a bygone era.



15 Central Park West comes off as an homage to an earlier age.

ROBERT POLIDORI

Today, if you want such luxuries as high ceilings and a dining room, an old building is pretty much the only place to find them. Forget Richard Meier and Jean Nouvel and their sleek glass condominiums: for connoisseurs of Manhattan apartments, the real celebrity architects have always been Rosario Candela, J. E. R. Carpenter, and Emery Roth, who designed the best buildings put up between the wars. That period—when Roth built the San Remo, on Central Park West, while Candela produced the sombre citadels of 740 Park Avenue and 834, 960, and 1040 Fifth Avenue—ended up being the glory years. Such buildings still represent the apogee of New York residential design. Brokers often mention Candela in their ads, because people will pay a premium to live in one of his buildings.

Candela has been dead for more than fifty years, but he should get at least partial credit for 15 Central Park West, a new apartment building, designed by Robert A. M. Stern, that occupies the full block between Central Park West and Broadway and Sixty-first and Sixty-second Streets. I have never seen anything quite like it: historical pastiche is common enough in country houses or museums, but it's rare on the scale of a skyscraper. Stern's entire building is covered in limestone (it took roughly eighty-five thousand pieces), outdoing even Candela, whose fanciest buildings still had brick at the back. The two hundred and one apartments have casement windows, ten-, eleven-, or fourteen-foot ceilings, dining rooms, plenty of moldings, and plenty of light, Stern having devised a floor plan that gives nearly every room an open view. I am not sure what Mumford would have found to complain about, other than the fact that the building looks as if it had been put up seventy-five years ago.

But that very conservatism may be why 15 Central Park West has become the most financially successful apartment building in the history of New York. All the apartments were sold before the building was finished, at prices that started at more than two thousand dollars a square foot and were subsequently raised nineteen times. Demand was so extreme that brokers started to worry that the building was taking all the business away from other high-end buildings nearby. Someone I know who bought an apartment early on for about twelve million dollars was offered the chance to resell it for potentially more than sixteen million before ever moving in. (He didn't bite.) The average three-bedroom, four-bath apartment went for more than ten million dollars, and the total selling price of the building was close to two billion. Among the buyers have been celebrities like Denzel Washington, Sting, Norman Lear, and Bob Costas, but, in truth, the more spectacular units went for prices that would make even a movie star blanch. The most expensive of all—a forty-five-million-dollar penthouse bought by the hedge-fund manager Daniel Loeb—was for a while the most expensive apartment ever sold in the city. A plurality of the buyers come from the world of finance, including Sanford Weill, the former head of Citibank, and Lloyd Blankfein, the C.E.O. of Goldman Sachs.

So what does twenty million buy you these days? When the building opens, this fall, it will have a private dining room for its residents, a walnut-panelled library, a screening room, and a chauffeurs' waiting room. There is also a wine-storage area, with thirty private wine cellars, sold separately, and, on a low floor, twenty-nine maids' suites, also sold separately. The layouts resemble those of classic apartments from the twenties, but instead of tiny kitchens and butlers' pantries and maids' rooms there are eat-in kitchens and picture windows, not to mention bathrooms big enough to bathe your polo pony in and closets the size of some studio apartments. The idea is to create, ready-made, the kind of place you would get by renovating an old apartment. Some occupants will take this a stage further, treating their apartment, or apartments, as raw space, stripping out the walls and starting over, perhaps to produce temples of luxury beyond even Stern's imagining.

A building like this leaves you two choices: you can resist it or you can yield to it. On one level, there's something unsettling about the whole thing—is costume-drama luxury the best that our new century has to offer? And what are we to make of the feeding frenzy surrounding it, in an already hypertrophied real-estate market? (Perhaps it's worth remembering that 740 Park Avenue, the 15 Central Park West of its time, went into construction a few months before the 1929 crash.) But the building itself is deeply seductive. For years, developers have been claiming that this one or that one of their latest creations signalled the restoration of prewar elegance, but it usually turns out to mean that they sprang for a powder room. This time, the assertion is not so hollow. Rooms are laid out in sumptuous procession around formal central galleries, and New York probably hasn't seen such exquisitely crafted marble trim in a residential lobby since the days of Cole Porter.

Stern, who is the dean of the Yale School of Architecture, has spent much of his life as a writer and a teacher, and the architecture of New York is his main subject. He began his career as a postmodernist, with a propensity for ironic quotations, but as the years have gone by (and he has become more successful) he has tossed away the pastiche in favor of replicating models of the past more directly. Stern is big on fitting into context: his business school at the University of Virginia is pure Thomas Jefferson, his Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge looks like a classic New England meeting house; he's done sprawling Shingle Style houses in East Hampton and Spanish Colonial ones in California. Stern knows how to do a building like 15 Central Park West better than almost anyone, which is why the details—such as the book-matching of marble slabs in the bathrooms—ring true and don't look like cheap imitation.

The building consists of two parts: the House, a twenty-story structure on Central Park West that mimics the pattern of terraced setbacks characteristic of its prewar neighbors; and the Tower, a thirty-five-story slab that rises behind it, on Broadway, topped by an ornate, asymmetrical loggia (hiding a cooling tower) based on Candela's rooftop design at 1040 Fifth Avenue. The House and the Tower are separated by a spacious courtyard containing a round glass pavilion with a copper-and-glass cupola. Dividing the full-block site like this was an ingenious piece of urban design: the traditional-looking front wing blends into Central Park West as if it had always been there, and the tower behind it looks at home among the taller towers of Broadway. A formal entrance on Central Park West leads to a lobby that evokes the world of one of New York's lost prewar hotels—the Marguery, perhaps, or the Park Lane.

In some ways, the building seems less a piece of architecture than a creation along the lines of Woody Allen's "Manhattan," an homage to the city by someone who not only loves the New York of the twenties and thirties but actually believes that he can will it back into existence. But, like Woody Allen, Stern is also smart enough not to be shackled by his infatuations. This building invokes the past to solve a set of contemporary problems: can you reproduce the grandeur of the past without any of the inconveniences that annoyed Mumford? And how can you make money on a piece of land for which the developers, the brothers Arthur and William Lie Zeckendorf, paid the seemingly outrageous price of more than four hundred million dollars? You don't recoup that kind of investment by putting up studio apartments, or monoliths of the type that have been going up all over town. Ubiquitous as glass condo buildings have lately become—glass is the new white brick—New York's wealthy, unlike their Mies van der Rohe-dwelling counterparts in Chicago, have always equated stone with substance. Even the Time Warner Center, after all, looks like the sort of development you might find in Hong Kong or Shanghai or Dubai. Whatever else you can say about 15 Central Park West, it could only be in New York. ♦

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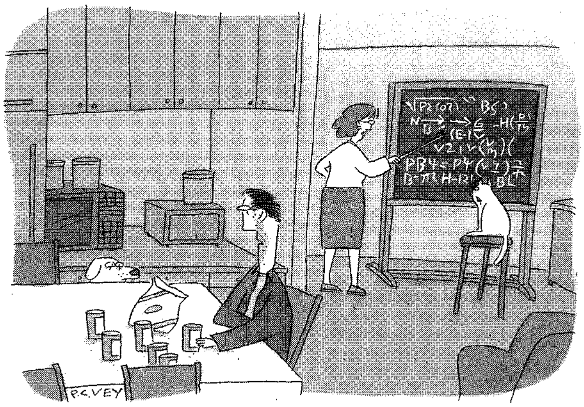
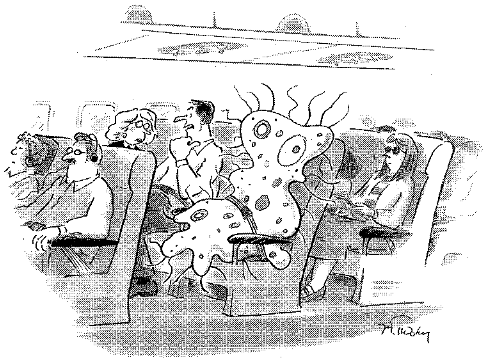
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Alex Gregory, must be received by Sunday, August 26th. Finalists in the August 13th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 17th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"You want to impress me? Drive to the store and get me more beer."
Ken Hoffman, Los Gatos, Calif.



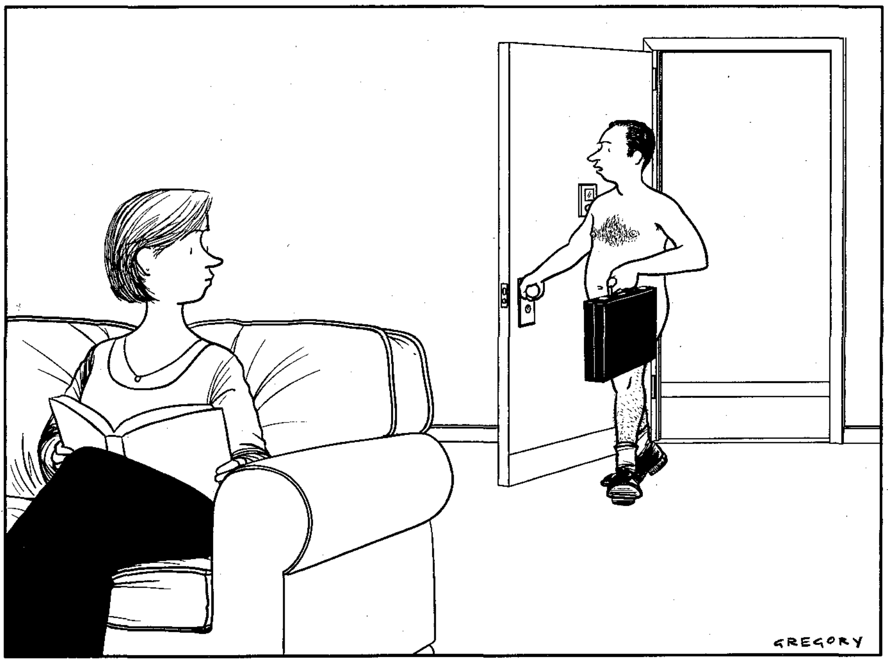
THE FINALISTS

"I hate connecting through Roswell."
James Montana, Arlington, Va.

"This guy's wife lets him drink on the plane!"
Shawn Broderick, Cottage Grove, Ore.

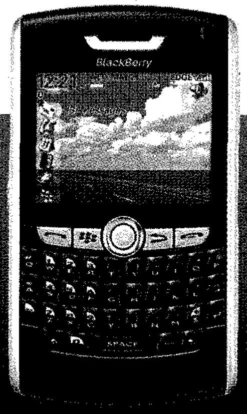
"I don't care if he's single-celled, he should have bought two seats."
Colin Nissan, Brooklyn, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

Premal Shah
President, Kiva.org
Micro-loans in developing countries



Ask Premal Shah Why He Loves His BlackBerry

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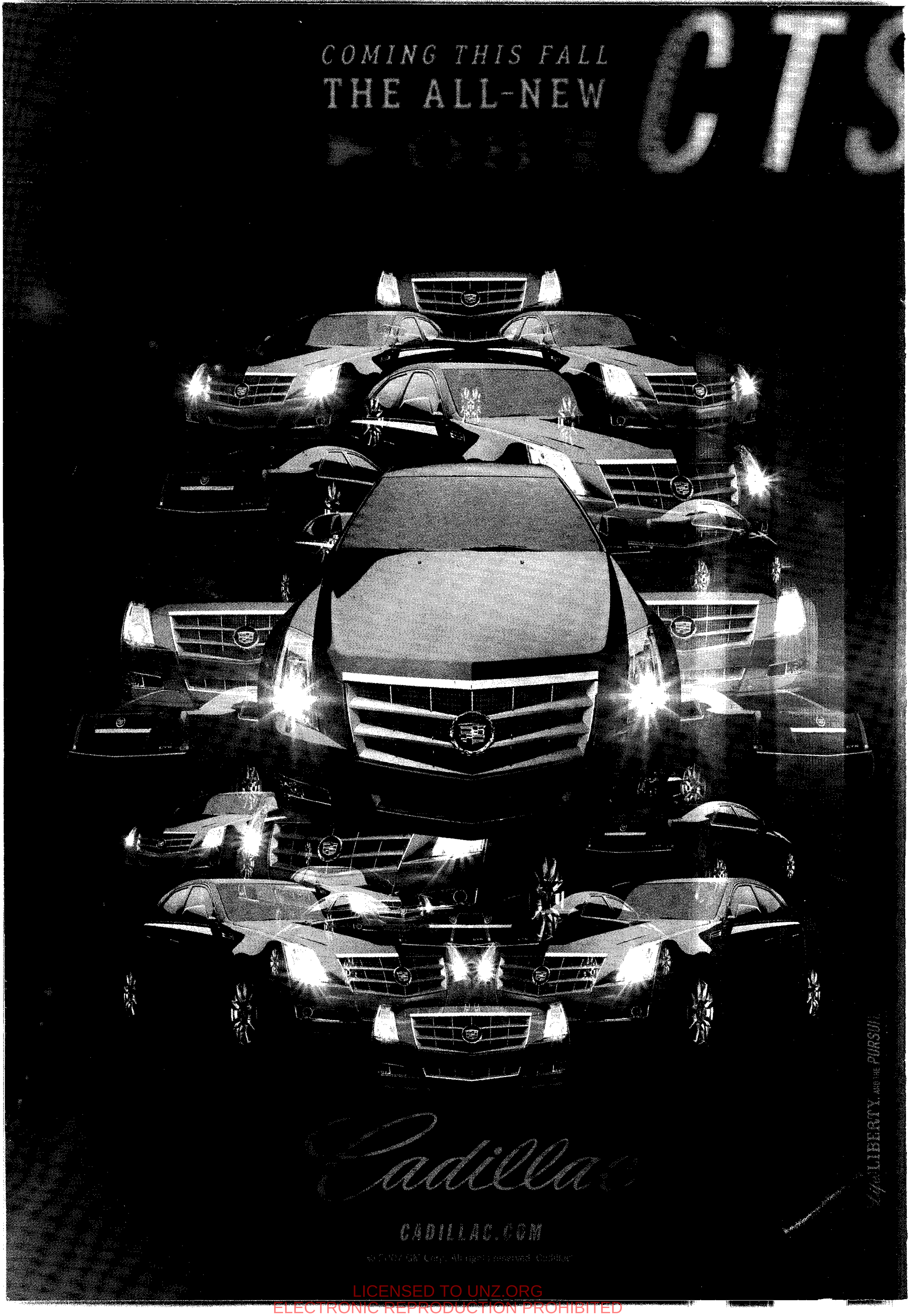
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